



PHD

Identity construction as a personal sense-making process: A case study of Estonian students in the United Kingdom

Martsin, Mariann

Award date:
2008

Awarding institution:
University of Bath

[Link to publication](#)

Alternative formats

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact:
openaccess@bath.ac.uk

Copyright of this thesis rests with the author. Access is subject to the above licence, if given. If no licence is specified above, original content in this thesis is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) Licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). Any third-party copyright material present remains the property of its respective owner(s) and is licensed under its existing terms.

Take down policy

If you consider content within Bath's Research Portal to be in breach of UK law, please contact: openaccess@bath.ac.uk with the details. Your claim will be investigated and, where appropriate, the item will be removed from public view as soon as possible.

**IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AS
A PERSONAL SENSE-MAKING PROCESS:
A CASE STUDY OF ESTONIAN STUDENTS
IN THE UNITED KINGDOM**

Mariann Märtsin

A thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Bath

Department of Education

October 2008

COPYRIGHT

Attention is drawn to the fact that copyright of this thesis rests with its author. This copy has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with its author and that no quotation from the thesis and no information derived from it may be published without the prior written consent of the author.

This thesis may be made available for consultation within the University Library and may be photocopied or lent to other libraries for the purposes of consultation.

.....

DECLARATION

I declare that *Identity construction as a personal sense-making process: A case study of Estonian students in the United Kingdom* is my own work, except where indicated, and that it has not been submitted before for any degree or any examination at any university.

Signed:

.....

Mariann Märtsin

October 2008

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe the completion of this project to many great people. First, I want to thank my supervisor Professor Harry Daniels. The time and energy that Harry has invested into this project is priceless. His suggestions and questions may have initially been challenging, but they have eventually influenced my thinking in ways that go far beyond the scope of this project. I will always be thankful to him for not only introducing me to the world of socio-cultural research, but in important ways to the academic world in general.

Second, I have been lucky to enjoy and benefit from the collaboration with another great thinker, Professor Jaan Valsiner. It has not only been Jaan's own work that has deeply inspired this research project, but also the enriching and thought-provoking feedback from him. The emails full of useful ideas and long discussions in Bath, Cambridge, Braga and Worcester have been crucial for the successful completion of this project. I hope I will be able to turn some of Jaan's wonderful suggestions into a reality as a way of thanking him for his help and support.

While I owe the strengths of this work to the contribution of these two great men, the shortcomings of the project are all mine.

In many ways this thesis is a story of eight amazing young people from Estonia. The current project would not exist without their enormous effort. I hope my analytical lens has not ruined the fascinating richness of their voices and experiences. My own life is richer now that I have known them.

My dream of returning to the academic life would not have come true without the constant emotional and moral support of my family and friends. Mai, Liis and Rika, Kristel, but above all Riina have always been interested in my activities and many simple questions from them have shaped in important manner my way of approaching this entire research enterprise. The days spent in the home of Giovanna and Renzo, surrounded by their love and care, have been essential in

times when I lost focus or hope or when there were simply too many things to worry about.

I also owe the experience of starting and finishing doctorate studies to the endless support of my parents and sister. While being physically away from them, I have always been encouraged, inspired and kept safe by their love. The words are not enough to express my gratitude to them for enabling me to follow my dream even if it has brought me away from them.

And last, I want to thank the one person who has been with me through all the good and bad times during the last three years when I was working on this project. Luca has experienced it all. He has made me coffee when I needed to stay awake and he has made me to go to bed, when my mind was too tired to think. He has listened to my endless moaning, always being able to offer me another, more constructive perspective and thus, always been able to show me the light in the end of the tunnel. His questions and comments have brought me back on earth, when my theories have started to flourish too wildly. He has pushed me to challenge myself in ways I never would have imagined being able to. If I now feel that my Ph.D. journey has been an interesting, rewarding and rather pleasant one, it is thanks to his support and unconditional love.

ABSTRACT

The reported study investigates identity construction of Estonian students who make short-term study visits to the United Kingdom. Looking at these cases, the study seeks to make a contribution to the conceptualization of identity construction as a personal sense-making process.

Identity is an extensively studied topic in social sciences. The conceptualization has moved from understanding identity as a stable entity, to seeing it as a dynamic personal construction of reality which is constrained by collective discourses. The current study uses the idea that in order to understand identity construction in its wholeness, both the process-like and entity-like nature of it need to be taken into account. The socio-cultural approach that emphasises the dynamic intertwinement of person and socio-cultural context through semiotic processes offers a possibility to build such a conceptualization. The ideas from this theoretical tradition informed the longitudinal study that was carried out as part of the research project. The study used a multiple-case study approach and investigated the life experiences of eight Estonians studying in the United Kingdom during a one-year period. The empirical data gathered during this study was used to define, test and refine a conceptual model of identity construction.

The proposed model sees identity construction as part of a person's ongoing sense-making process. Identity is understood as a personally significant and highly generalized metasign that a person constructs in order to solve a tension-filled life-situation and to re-establish person/context equilibrium.

Based on the empirical study, two main aspects of the model, which need to be further refined, were identified. First, the role of the other in its different forms needs to be taken into account when conceptualizing identity construction. Second, the notion of rupture needs to be further elaborated to explain the differing effects of ruptures in personal sense-making.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	I
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	II
ABSTRACT	IV
TABLE OF CONTENTS	V
LIST OF TABLES	XI
LIST OF FIGURES	XII
LIST OF APPENDICES	XV
INTRODUCTION	1
IDENTITY RESEARCH – POPULAR, BUT FRAGMENTED	1
WHY ANOTHER STUDY ABOUT IDENTITY?	2
IDENTITY – ENTITY OR PROCESS?	3
FOCUS OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY	4
STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS	5
CHAPTER 1. FOCUS OF THE STUDY	9
1.1 FOCUS OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS	9
1.2 AIM OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY IN THIS INVESTIGATION	11
CHAPTER 2. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY	13
2.1 IDENTITY IN THE POST-MODERN ERA	14
2.2 DEBATES CONCERNING EUROPEAN IDENTITY	16
2.3 DEBATES CONCERNING ESTONIAN IDENTITY	18
2.4 COLLECTIVE DISCOURSES ABOUT IDENTITY IN THIS STUDY	22
CHAPTER 3. IDENTITY – ENTITY OR PROCESS?	25
3.1 INTRODUCTION	25
3.2 INDIVIDUALISTIC AND ESSENTIALIST THEORIES OF IDENTITY	27
3.2.1 <i>Social identity theory and identity theory</i>	27
3.2.1.1 Identity and its formation in identity theory	27
3.2.1.2 Identity and its formation in social identity theory	29
3.2.1.3 Identity as an entity in identity theory and social identity theory	31
3.2.1.4 Summary of the limitations of identity theory and social identity theory	34
3.2.2 <i>Acculturation and stage theories of identity</i>	34
3.2.2.1 Acculturation theory – cultures as entities to accept or reject	34

3.2.2.2 Stage theories – from exploring to achieving an identity	37
3.2.2.3 Limitations of acculturation and stage theories	39
3.3 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST VIEW OF IDENTITY	40
3.3.1 <i>Discursive realities</i>	40
3.3.2 <i>Analysing discursive practices and powerful texts</i>	41
3.3.3 <i>Limitations of the social constructionist view</i>	42
3.4 CONCLUSIONS	44
CHAPTER 4. THEORETICAL BASIS OF THE STUDY	45
4.1 SOCIO-GENETIC NATURE OF HUMAN PSYCHE – A REDISCOVERED OLD IDEA	46
4.2 UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS OF THE SOCIO-CULTURAL APPROACH	48
4.3 PERSON WITHIN THE SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT	49
4.3.1 <i>Person in multiple ‘figured worlds’</i>	49
4.3.2 <i>Individual meaning space as personal culture</i>	51
4.3.3 <i>Shared socio-cultural context as collective culture</i>	53
4.4 DYNAMIC INTERTWINING OF THE PERSON AND THE SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT	55
4.4.1 <i>Semiotic mediation as the basis of person-context intertwining</i>	55
4.4.2 <i>Processes underlying person-context intertwining</i>	56
4.4.2.1 Active internalization	57
4.4.2.2 Creative externalization	59
4.4.3 <i>Social interaction in semiotic mediation</i>	61
4.4.4 <i>From cultural artefacts and collective meaning potentials to tools, symbolic resources and subjective signs</i>	62
4.5 CONSTRUCTION OF SUBJECTIVE SIGNS	65
4.5.1 <i>Laminal model of subjective sign construction</i>	65
4.5.2 <i>Personal life-goal orientations as highly generalized metasigns</i>	69
4.6 DIALOGUE WITH THE OTHER IN PERSON-CONTEXT INTERTWINING	71
4.6.1 <i>Different modes of otherness within the self-system</i>	72
4.6.2 <i>Self-other dialogue as basis of subjective sign construction and self-reflection</i>	74
4.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE AND THE FOCUS OF THIS STUDY	77
CHAPTER 5. INTRODUCTION TO THE EMPIRICAL STUDY	79
5.1 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY	80
5.2 PROCESS OF DATA COLLECTION	81
5.3 MODEL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH CASE STUDY ANALYSIS	82
5.4 PRESENTATION OF THE CASE STUDIES	83
CHAPTER 6. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY	85
6.1 STUDYING DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESSES – IMPLICATIONS FOR THE RESEARCH STRATEGY	86
6.1.1 <i>Person and context – dynamic and interwoven whole</i>	86

6.1.2 <i>Idiographic study of developmental processes</i>	87
6.1.3 <i>Research strategy implemented here</i>	88
6.2 GENERALIZATIONS BASED ON CASE STUDIES	90
6.3 STUDY PARTICIPANTS	92
6.4 DESIGN OF THE STUDY	94
6.4.1 <i>Individual interviews</i>	94
6.4.1.1 Content of the interviews	95
6.4.1.2 Exercises used in the interviews	96
6.4.2 <i>Questionnaires</i>	99
6.4.3 <i>Focus Groups</i>	101
6.4.4 <i>General sequence of the study</i>	103
6.5 PRINCIPLES OF DATA ANALYSIS	104
6.5.1 <i>Stages of data analysis</i>	104
6.5.1.1 Intra-case analysis	104
6.5.1.2 Inter-case analysis	106
6.5.2 <i>Analytical categories used in the analysis</i>	107
6.5.3 <i>Language of data analysis and quotations</i>	108
6.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	108
6.6.1 <i>Confidentiality of participants</i>	108
6.6.2 <i>Participant and researcher relationship</i>	110
6.6.3 <i>This investigation as a significant rupture in study participants' lives</i>	111
CHAPTER 7. CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION	113
7.1 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE MODEL	113
7.2 IDENTITY AS CONSTRUCTED METASIGN	116
7.3 DOMAINS OF EXPERIENCING AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION	117
7.4 RUPTURE AS A TRIGGER OF IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION	119
CHAPTER 8. CASE ANALYSIS	122
8.1 THE CASE OF A.	122
8.1.1 <i>Background</i>	122
8.1.2 <i>Timeline analysis</i>	123
8.1.3 <i>Thematic analysis</i>	125
8.1.3.1 I am my partner's partner now	125
8.1.3.2 My life between London and Tartu	127
8.1.3.3 Am I prolonging my childhood?	130
8.1.3.4 I am simply a Londoner and Estonian	133
8.1.4 <i>Summary</i>	136
8.2 THE CASE OF E.	137
8.2.1 <i>Background</i>	137

8.2.2 <i>Timeline analysis</i>	137
8.2.3 <i>Thematic analysis</i>	139
8.2.3.1 I want to live a stimulating life	139
8.2.3.2 I need stimulation, but also security	141
8.2.3.3 I am in London, but my heart is in Estonia	143
8.2.3.4 I am not Polish, I am Estonian	146
8.2.4 <i>Summary</i>	148
8.3 THE CASE OF H.	149
8.3.1 <i>Background</i>	149
8.3.2 <i>Timeline analysis</i>	149
8.3.3 <i>Thematic analysis</i>	151
8.3.3.1 From fake to real life and back	151
8.3.3.2 I was a better person in England	155
8.3.3.3 Where are my true friends?	158
8.3.3.4 He makes me happy, so I want to try	161
8.3.4 <i>Summary</i>	164
8.4 THE CASE OF L.	165
8.4.1 <i>Background</i>	165
8.4.2 <i>Timeline analysis</i>	166
8.4.3 <i>Thematic analysis</i>	167
8.4.3.1 I am a foreigner in England	167
8.4.3.2 I am stronger now	171
8.4.4 <i>Summary</i>	173
8.5 THE CASE OF N.	173
8.5.1 <i>Background</i>	173
8.5.2 <i>Timeline analysis</i>	174
8.5.3 <i>Thematic analysis</i>	176
8.5.3.1 I found myself in London	176
8.5.3.2 I am still searching for my way	177
8.5.3.3 I do not want to be alone when I am 30	180
8.5.3.4 I need to be focused	182
8.5.4 <i>Summary</i>	184
8.6 THE CASE OF P.	185
8.6.1 <i>Background</i>	185
8.6.2 <i>Timeline analysis</i>	186
8.6.3 <i>Thematic analysis</i>	189
8.6.3.1 I am smart and successful	189
8.6.3.2 What should I do in the future?	191
8.6.3.3 “Being Estonian is a full-time job”	193
8.6.3.4 My name – my identity	196
8.6.4 <i>Summary</i>	198

8.7 THE CASE OF R.	199
8.7.1 <i>Background</i>	199
8.7.2 <i>Timeline analysis</i>	199
8.7.3 <i>Thematic analysis</i>	202
8.7.3.1 I am smart and successful	202
8.7.3.2 Where should I live?	204
8.7.3.3 I have good friends both in England and in Estonia	207
8.7.3.4 I am a smart woman from East-Europe	210
8.7.4 <i>Summary</i>	213
8.8 THE CASE OF T.	214
8.8.1 <i>Background</i>	214
8.8.2 <i>Timeline analysis</i>	214
8.8.3 <i>Thematic analysis</i>	216
8.8.3.1 Responsible adult in England, a child in Estonia	216
8.8.3.2 Open-minded, but responsible me	219
8.8.3.3 I take my relationships more easily now	223
8.8.3.4 I am a Russian from Estonia	226
8.8.4 <i>Summary</i>	228
8.9 INTER-CASE ANALYSIS	229
8.9.1 <i>Themes of personal sense-making across the cases</i>	229
8.9.2 <i>Move abroad as an expected significant rupture in individuals' lives</i>	230
8.9.3 <i>Other events as significant ruptures in study participants' lives</i>	231
8.10 SUMMARY	233
CHAPTER 9. EXTENSIONS OF THE MODEL	235
9.1 FRENCH SCHOOLGIRLS' HEADSCARVES AS SYMBOLS OF ISLAM IDENTITY	235
9.2 "WHEN DO YOU GO BACK HOME?": CREATING INDIAN IDENTITY IN AMERICA	238
CHAPTER 10. GENERAL DISCUSSION	242
10.1 SUITABILITY OF THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL	243
10.1.1 <i>Theoretical acceptability of the proposed conceptual model</i>	244
10.1.1.1 Identities as constantly re-constructed personal meanings	244
10.1.1.2 Identity construction as a boundary-process	247
10.1.2 <i>Interpretative capacity of the proposed conceptual model</i>	249
10.2 SUITABILITY OF THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH	251
10.2.1 <i>Longitudinal study design</i>	251
10.2.2 <i>Data collection methods</i>	252
CHAPTER 11. MODEL REFINEMENT	255
11.1 THE ROLE OF THE OTHER IN PERSONAL SENSE-MAKING	255
11.1.1 <i>Forms of otherness within the self-system</i>	256

11.1.2 Voice of the other as catalyst of identity construction	257
11.1.3 Voice of the other as a tension reduction mechanism	259
11.2 RUPTURE AS A TRIGGER OF IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION	261
11.2.1 Dimensions of subjective signs	261
11.2.2 A typology of ruptures	263
11.3 INTRA-PSYCHOLOGICAL FIELD AS A COMPLEX SYSTEM OF MULTIPLE, PARALLEL AND INTERWOVEN STRANDS OF PERSONAL SENSE-MAKING	267
CHAPTER 12. SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS	269
12.1 CONTRIBUTION OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT	269
12.1.1 Theoretically grounded way of understanding identity and identity construction	269
12.1.2 Further elaboration of the role of the other in personal sense-making	270
12.1.3 Further specification of the notion of rupture	270
12.1.4 New way of illustrating the functioning of the intra-psychological field	271
12.2 POSSIBLE FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT	271
12.2.1 Micro-genesis and personal sense-making	271
12.2.2 Externalization and personal sense-making	272
12.2.3 Extension of the model to other contexts	273
REFERENCES	275
APPENDIX A	291
APPENDIX B	295
APPENDIX C	296
APPENDIX D	301
APPENDIX E	302
APPENDIX F	314

LIST OF TABLES

Table 6.3 Summary of the basic characteristics of study participants	93
Table 6.4.4 General sequence of the study	103
Table 8.1.2 A. – Timeline analysis	124
Table 8.2.2 E. – Timeline analysis	139
Table 8.3.2 H. – Timeline analysis	151
Table 8.4.2 L. – Timeline analysis	167
Table 8.5.2 N. – Timeline analysis	175
Table 8.6.2 P. – Timeline analysis	188
Table 8.7.2 R. – Timeline analysis	201
Table 8.8.2 T. – Timeline analysis	216
Table 8.9.3 Life-events as ruptures in study participants’ lives.....	231
Table E1. A.’s answers to sentence completion exercise.....	302
Table E2. E.’s answers to sentence completion exercise.....	303
Table E3. H.’s answers to sentence completion exercise.....	304
Table E4. L.’s answers to sentence completion exercise.....	305
Table E5. N.’s answers to sentence completion exercise.....	309
Table E6. P.’s answers to sentence completion exercise.....	310
Table E7. R.’s answers to sentence completion exercise.....	311
Table E8. T.’s answers to sentence completion exercise.....	312

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.4.3 Semiotic prism	62
Figure 4.5.1 Laminar model of subjective sign construction	66
Figure 7.1 Conceptual model of identity construction	114
Figure 8.1.3.1 A. – I am my partner’s partner now	126
Figure 8.1.3.2 A. – My life between London and Tartu	129
Figure 8.1.3.3 A. – Am I prolonging my childhood?	132
Figure 8.1.3.4 A. – I am simply a Londoner and Estonian	135
Figure 8.2.3.1 E. – I want to live a stimulating life	140
Figure 8.2.3.2 E. – I need stimulation, but also security	143
Figure 8.2.3.3 E. – I am in London, but my heart is in Estonia	145
Figure 8.2.3.4 E. – I am not Polish, I am Estonian	148
Figure 8.3.3.1 H. – From fake to real life and back	154
Figure 8.3.3.2 H. – I was a better person in England	157
Figure 8.3.3.3 H. – Where are my true friends?	159
Figure 8.3.3.4 H. – He makes me happy, so I want to try	163
Figure 8.4.3.1 L. – I am a foreigner in England	169
Figure 8.4.3.2 L. – I am stronger now	172
Figure 8.5.3.1 N. – I found myself in London	177
Figure 8.5.3.2 N. – I am still searching for my way	179

Figure 8.5.3.3 N. – I do not want to be alone when I am 30	182
Figure 8.5.3.4 N. – I need to be focused	184
Figure 8.6.3.1 P. – I am smart and successful	190
Figure 8.6.3.2 P. – What should I do in the future?	193
Figure 8.6.3.3 P. – “Being Estonian is a full-time job”	196
Figure 8.6.3.4 P. – My name – my identity	198
Figure 8.7.3.1 R. – I am smart and successful	203
Figure 8.7.3.2 R. – Where should I live?	207
Figure 8.7.3.3 R. – I have good friends both in England and in Estonia	210
Figure 8.7.3.4 R. – I am a smart Eastern-European woman	212
Figure 8.8.3.1 T. – Adult in England, child in Estonia	219
Figure 8.8.3.2 T. – Open-minded, but responsible me	222
Figure 8.8.3.3 T. – I take my relationships more easily now	225
Figure 8.8.3.4 T. – I am a Russian from Estonia	228
Figure 11.2.1 Dimensions of subjective signs.....	262
Figure 11.2.2 Typology of ruptures	264
Figure F1 A.’s life-trajectory during Sept. 2006 – Sept. 2007.....	314
Figure F2 E.’s life-trajectory during Sept. 2006 – Sept. 2007.....	315
Figure F3 H.’s life-trajectory during Aug. 2006 – Aug. 2007.....	316
Figure F4 L.’s life-trajectory during Aug. 2006 – July. 2007.....	317
Figure F5 N.’s life-trajectory during Sept. 2006 – Aug. 2007.....	318

Figure F6 P.'s life-trajectory during Oct. 2006 – Sept. 2007.....	319
Figure F7 R.'s life-trajectory during Sept. 2006 – Oct. 2007.....	320
Figure F8 T.'s life-trajectory during Sept. 2006 – Aug. 2007.....	321

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A

Invitation letter sent to potential study participants.....**291**

Appendix B

Self-description exercise. Common words used for self-description.....**295**

Appendix C

Monthly questionnaires. General instruction and common questions..... **296**

Appendix D

Sentence completion exercise. Beginnings of the sentences..... **301**

Appendix E

Sentence completion exercise. Answers of the participants..... **302**

Appendix F

Life-trajectory drawing task. Drawings of the participants.....**314**

INTRODUCTION

The research project that is reported in this dissertation deals with the topic of identity. It seeks to understand how identity is constructed in the ongoing person-context interaction. The reported project is theoretically oriented. It seeks to offer a conceptual model of identity and identity construction. The proposed conceptual model is informed by the general theoretical ideas formulated within the socio-cultural tradition. It is developed using data from an empirical investigation that was carried out as part of the project. Empirical material from this research project has also been used for testing and refining the model.

Identity research – popular, but fragmented

In recent decades identity has become a widely theorised and researched subject in social sciences. Despite this vast interest there seems to be little consensus among social scientists about the ways identity should be conceptualised and studied. It is possible to identify at least three different meanings of identity from the relevant literature. First, identity is often understood in terms of identifying with something or someone. The question of sameness between the self and the other is central to this research strand. Second, identity is looked at as the sameness within the person across time and space. The questions about changing

and remaining, about the rigid core as opposed to flexible periphery, are relevant to this research field. Third, the notion of identity is often connected very closely with the notion of agency. The questions about being and becoming, as well as issues of marginalization and giving voice to those who previously were unseen, are essential here.

This three-fold grouping is not meant to be exhaustive for describing this popular research field. These three meanings of identity are often used in combination, creating other ways of conceptualising identity. However, this grouping does illustrate the fragmentation and diversity that exists in this popular field of research.

The study that is reported in this thesis uses mostly the second meaning of identity. It looks at identity as semiotically constructed sense of sameness within the person across time and space. However, this sense of sameness is often related to different kinds of identifications. Hence, the question of the person in relation to others will also be discussed in the current study.

Why another study about identity?

While the questions of relevance and value of the study are always important, these seem to become even more significant when conducting a research in a popular and widely-investigated field, such as that of identity. What is it in this study about identity that has not yet been done? What new can this study add to the field that is already highly saturated?

The study reported here is in important ways motivated by my personal belief that the concept of identity is a valuable notion that makes sense to lay people as well as being possibly a useful analytical tool for social scientists. However, for a concept to function in this way it needs to be appropriately defined. Unfortunately, this is not always the case in the contemporary identity research. It seems that because everybody has something to say about identity, nobody anymore takes time to define what is meant by this concept and why it is considered to be a necessary notion to use. As a result, the concept has become

almost too popular, too widely used, rarely clearly defined, overloaded with meanings and therefore somewhat de-valued. Being positioned within this general trend, the study reported here endeavours to make an effort in bringing back the focus and some clarity to this field of research.

Being motivated by the goal of bringing clarity to the field of identity research, as well as seeking to re-appreciate this overloaded concept, the current investigation seeks to go back to the beginning and asks the question, what people do when they construct identities in their everyday activities. The study proposes a simple answer to this question: when making claims about their identities, when stating who they are, people make meanings, they create personal sense. According to the view put forward in this investigation, identity is therefore not a special kind of entity, nor is identity construction a special kind of psychological process. Rather, identity construction, it is argued, can be understood as part of person's ongoing sense-making process. Identity is, according to this view, a personally significant and highly generalized sign that people construct in order to create a sense of sameness and continuity across time and space.

Hence, the current investigation does not seek to offer yet another conceptualization of identity. Rather it seeks to bring together many already existing ideas in the field, and by synthesising these, offer a general model of identity and identity construction that can be used in different contexts and with different thematic content areas.

Identity – entity or process?

Despite the previously mentioned differences in the conceptualization of identity this research field seems to be characterized by one general trend. In accordance with the general constructionist shift within the social sciences, the conceptualization of identity has increasingly moved from entity-centred to a process-centred perspective. That is to say, the conceptualization of identity has moved from understanding identity as a fixed and relatively stable entity that people create based on their interactions with the environment and thereafter carry with them from one context to another, to understanding identity as a fluid,

multiple, fragmented, dialogical, constantly constructed, re-constructed and negotiated process. Hence, the mainstream individualistic and essentialist theories of identity have in fruitful ways given space for studies that emphasise the constructionist nature of identity.

The current investigation is situated within these debates. While having started from a process-oriented perspective, it has gradually moved towards looking at identity as a concept that combines both of these aspects – the process-like and entity-like nature. Therefore, it is assumed in the current exploration that while identities are constantly semiotically constructed and re-constructed, there are also certain moments in time, when these semiotic constructions become relatively stable and fixed. As a personally significant and highly generalized sign, identity can create a temporary sense of sameness and continuity, an episodic state where a person's understanding of oneself and the surrounding world becomes temporarily fixed and stabilized. These episodic moments reflect an entity-like nature of identity. In the next moment of time these subjective signs become re-constructed again, that is, the identity construction as a process moves on, but the sense of sameness remains and can be seen as an entity to which a person can refer to and hold on to.

Hence, when seeking to fill its objective of bringing clarity to the field of identity research the current investigation proposes a model of identity that combines both the process-like and entity-like nature of identity.

Focus of the empirical study

A longitudinal study that investigated the life-experiences of eight Estonian students who made relatively short-term study visits to the United Kingdom (UK) is reported in this dissertation. The study, which lasted for one year, sought to explore in detail the students' life-experiences and identify situations that triggered personal sense-making episodes, including identity construction. The students were asked to report their experiences and related thoughts and feelings regularly during the study period through the use of questionnaires and interviews. This enabled to collect a rich description of their life-journeys during a one-year

period. This detailed and person-specific data was used to explore and reveal how identities as subjective signs become constructed and allow effective functioning in the surrounding socio-cultural context.

While the empirical study carried out as part of this investigation concentrates on life-experiences and related identity construction episodes of Estonian students in the UK, it is not a study about ethnic identity in general and Estonian ethnic identity in particular. Neither is it an investigation of foreign students' or Estonian students' acculturation and integration into the UK university context and society. This is a study about identity in general. It seeks to understand what identity is and how it is constructed in general, universal terms, irrespective of the particular context or content of identity. Hence, the empirical study reported in the dissertation serves as a way of developing a generalized model of identity construction based on specific case studies and thereafter testing the utility and applicability of the proposed model.

Structure of the thesis

The present thesis can be divided into two parts. The first chapters offer an overview of the theoretical basis of the project, while the second part concentrates on the empirical study.

The dissertation starts with defining the focus of the investigation. Hence, in the first chapter the general research questions and the ways in which these have been approached in the study are defined. The discussion thereafter moves on to the contextualization of this investigation. In Chapter 2 the discourse about the omnipresent identity crises of the post-modern era, as well as the debates about European and Estonian identity are briefly discussed. On the one hand, this chapter seeks to map the themes that have informed the current research, and therefore positions the investigation into the wider research area. On the other hand, the chapter aims to make the reader, who is not familiar with the Estonian context, acquainted with the themes that are historically and socio-culturally important in that context. The chapter will give the reader a feel of the themes that will occur later in the dissertation when young people's life

experiences in the UK will be discussed. It is worth mentioning that many of the studies that are referred to in this chapter use a different theoretical background and define identity differently from the current investigation. However, the reader is encouraged to overlook these theoretical differences and use this chapter mainly to familiarise oneself with the general context of the study.

After this general introduction the discussion turns to the theoretical background of the reported study. As mentioned previously, the study is positioned within the debates in the field of identity research that concern the entity-like and process-like nature of identity. Chapter 3 seeks to offer the reader a sense of what it means to conceptualize identity in terms of entity as opposed to conceptualizing it as a process. The chapter is built around the general idea that in broad terms individualistic and essentialist theories of identity are entity-centred, while social constructionist approach is process-centred. As the current investigation seeks to combine the two aspects of identity (i.e. both entity-like and process-like nature of identity), these two theoretical perspectives are regarded as one-sided and limited and therefore abandoned.

In Chapter 4 the socio-cultural perspective is introduced as a theoretical tradition that has the potential to offer a suitable theoretical basis for the study. While this theoretical tradition has been successful in introducing many fruitful ideas about the human psychological functioning in and in relation to the socio-cultural context, currently it does not offer a general theoretical model of identity. Hence, in Chapter 4 an overview of the ideas, which are relevant for understanding identity construction as a personal sense-making process, will be given. These ideas are again taken up, combined and synthesised in Chapter 7 where a generalized model of identity construction is described.

The empirical study that was carried out as part of the current research project is reported in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8. The general introduction to the empirical study is given in Chapter 5, followed by the discussion of the methodological approach utilized in the study in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 will provide a description of the conceptual model of identity construction that was developed in the current investigation. This model was initially defined based on the data

from a single case analysis and thereafter generalized using the data from other cases. The model is described in the current dissertation before the details of the data analysis are presented. This is done mainly to provide the reader with a clear conceptual framework through which to approach the data. The data presented in the following chapter can, then, be used to evaluate the usefulness of the proposed model for interpretation.

This generalized model of identity construction is central to the current investigation. It is designed as a universalistic model which can be used in different contexts and in relation to different thematic content areas. It is a way of answering the general research questions (i.e. how is identity constructed in ongoing person/context interaction and what is identity) in a theoretical manner. Therefore, this model can be seen as the main contribution the current study makes to the general field of identity research.

In Chapter 8 the results of the data analysis are described. The case studies portrayed in this chapter offer a detailed and in-depth look into the lives of the eight young people who participated in the study during a one-year period. Their life-experiences and related sense-making episodes are described in a lengthy manner in order to do justice to the richness and complexity of their lives. While being fascinatingly idiosyncratic and unique, the life-trajectories and the ways these young people deal with the unexpected and/or anticipated events in their lives reveal the universal processes of personal meaning-making. While the intra-individual analysis in this chapter seeks to show the applicability of the model to different themes and contents of the personal sense-making, the inter-individual analysis in the end of the chapter aims to reveal some similarities between the cases.

In order to demonstrate the applicability of the proposed conceptual model to other time and space contexts, as well as to other thematic content areas, two further cases which are analysed according to the proposed model are presented in Chapter 9. The French school-girls' head-scarf affair and the making of Indian identity in American context are discussed briefly to place the current work into a wider context and show that the proposed model can be extended

beyond the analysis of the life-experiences of Estonian students in the UK.

The final two chapters of the dissertation return to the theoretical themes. Here it will be explored what was learned about identity and identity construction through this investigation. This part of dissertation is divided into two chapters. Chapter 10 offers a general discussion of the main underlying assumptions of the study. This discussion will focus on three issues. First, the theoretical suitability of the proposed model will be discussed through analysing to what extent was the proposed model able to avoid the limitations of other (criticised) theoretical perspectives. Second, the interpretative capacity of the model, that is the utility of the model for data analysis, will be discussed. Third, the suitability of the chosen methodological approach will be considered.

In Chapter 11 the conceptual model, which was proposed in this investigation will be re-visited in detail. Based on the empirical study, two main aspects of the model, which need to be further developed, were identified. First, the role of the other in its different forms in personal sense-making and identity construction will be discussed. Second, the ways in which the notion of rupture, which has an important place in the proposed model, can be further develop, are examined. The chapter will conclude with offering a new way of conceptualizing intra-psychological system that emerged from this research project.

General conclusions derived from this investigation are summarized in the final chapter of the thesis. It will be argued here that the study has made a contribution to the general field of identity research by offering a theoretically grounded and explicitly explained way of understanding identity and identity construction. In addition to that, it will be claimed that the study has given an input to the socio-cultural tradition by offering a further theoretical specification of the notion of rupture, explaining the role of the other in identity construction and offering a new way of conceptualizing the intra-psychological field as a complex system of multiple, parallel and interwoven strands of personal sense-making. The possible future directions of the research are also pointed out in this final chapter.

CHAPTER 1

FOCUS OF THE STUDY

1.1 Focus of the study and research questions

The study reported in this thesis is explorative and descriptive in its nature. The focus of the investigation is to understand the process by way of which identity becomes constructed. The research is therefore seeking to answer the general research question:

- How is identity constructed in the ongoing interaction between the person and the surrounding socio-cultural context?

More specifically this research question has meant exploring whether identity construction is a special kind of psychological process with specific characteristics or whether it is part of a more general psychological process that people engage with in their everyday functioning.

While the central focus of this research project has been to investigate the process by way of which identity becomes constructed, the questions about the outcome of this process have become increasingly relevant for the project as well. In other words, while starting from the interest in the process, the research has

moved towards an understanding that certain relatively stable entities become created as a result of this process. Hence, the need to focus both on the process as well as on the outcome of that process, has led to the definition of an additional research question:

- What is identity that becomes constructed in the ongoing interaction between the person and the socio-cultural context?

More specifically this research question has meant exploring the question of stability and sameness that is provided by identity. In other words, how to combine the idea that identity is constantly constructed and re-constructed, with the idea that it offers a sense of sameness, stability, coherence and continuity to the individual.

In order to answer these general research questions a conceptual model of identity construction was created as part of this investigation. The details of model development are given in Chapter 6. The model itself is described in detail in Chapter 7. The proposed conceptual model offers a hypothetical answer to the general research questions. In other words, the general research questions which are theoretical in nature require a theoretical answer, which is provided by the proposed conceptual model. According to this model, identity construction is understood as part of a person's ongoing sense-making process and identity is understood as a personally significant and highly generalized sign that becomes temporarily constructed and stabilized in this process. Using the proposed conceptual model, the general research questions have been translated into a more specific focus of the study:

- Is it possible to analyse and interpret identity construction episodes using the following cycle: rupture → semiotic auto-regulation → re-establishment of person/context equilibrium?
- What kinds of life-events are perceived as ruptures that trigger personal sense-making, including identity construction by study participants?
- What is the role of the social other in creating ruptures and triggering

personal sense-making, including identity construction?

- Is it possible to identify different dialogically interacting voices in study participants' sense-making efforts? Which are the important voices that the study participants use in their efforts to make sense of themselves and the world around them?

The current research project aims at testing the utility and applicability of the proposed conceptual model using the data from a specific empirical study. The project seeks to investigate whether the proposed conceptual model can be utilized to make sense of the rich and complex life-experiences of the Estonian students living in the UK, and bring out how identities become constructed in the case of these young people.

1.2 Aim of the empirical study in this investigation

The empirical study that is reported in this thesis investigates the life-experiences of eight Estonian students who make relatively short-term study visits to the UK. The study explores the sense-making efforts, including identity construction episodes of these young people, as they seek to find an effective way of functioning within and in relation to their new socio-cultural context. However, in accordance with the general theoretical focus of the study, the individual cases from this empirical investigation are not used here with the aim of making generalizations to the population of young people studying abroad, nor to the population of Estonian students in the UK. Instead the aim is to make theoretical generalizations that enable to see whether the proposed model is suitable for interpreting the data about identity and identity construction.

In line with this general aim of the study no specific research questions or hypotheses about Estonians studying in the UK are considered in this work. Instead, it is hypothesised that the proposed conceptual model is suitable for understanding identity construction in different time and space contexts, as well as in relation to different thematic content areas. The case studies presented in the thesis are used to test this hypothesis. In addition to this, two extra examples from

other contexts are analysed using the model with the aim to further test this hypothesis about the universal nature of the model.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The present chapter seeks to offer a general understanding of the context of the research reported here. This will be done by mapping the currently prevailing debates in the social sciences about issues of identity that have informed the current research. The chapter aims to explain why it is important to study identity in general and offers reasons why Estonians and their identity struggles may be a particularly interesting case to look at. Three thematic areas are touched upon in the chapter: identity in the post-modern era, debates related to the concept of European identity and discussions concerning Estonian identity. The chapter offers a brief overview of the main arguments and discussions within each area. It concludes with pointing out how these debates have been taken up in the current research, therefore positioning the present investigation into a wider research area.

In addition to this, by discussing the above mentioned topics, the chapter seeks to familiarize the reader with the general historical and socio-cultural circumstances of the empirical study which is part of the current research project. For the reader, who is not familiar with the Estonian context, the chapter offers a way of understanding the themes that are relevant for the people from that socio-cultural background. The understanding of these general themes should

enable the reader to better understand the struggles and dilemmas that will be discussed later in the dissertation when life-experiences of the study participants, which are the focal point of the current research, will be examined.

2.1 Identity in the post-modern era

Identity has become an acute problem and extensively studied and theorized concept in social sciences in recent decades (see for example Bauman, 2001). One possibility of understanding this current wide-spread concern is to analyse the changes that have emerged in the mentality of Western people over the centuries. Burckhardt (1860/2003) argues that the appearance of the self-conscious individual in Renaissance Europe led to an increased trust in the individual's abilities and capacities, and to a decreased faith in heavenly foreordination. The idea of divinely predetermined life-course was replaced by the idea of the individual's life project, which seeks to fulfil a person's potential and aims to complete the 'unfinished self'. Bauman (2001) suggests that this 'project of becoming' was a person's main life task in modern times. The well-established social types and modes of conduct were available for one to engage with (e.g., clearly defined social class and gender roles). These were the desirable end-goals towards which self-fulfilling individuals could strive.

A similar kind of 'self-realization discourse', the search for one's 'true purpose' of life, the constant need to develop and grow, is prevalent also in the current post-modern era (Brinkmann, 2008). However, according to Bauman the post-modern time no longer offers these well-rehearsed social positions with related identities for people to take on. Instead of acting like pilgrims with a clear destination, the post-modern people are like vagabonds trying to find out where to go next (Bauman, 2001). Furthermore, Brinkmann (2008) argues that in the society, where the self-search is the main goal of individuals' lives, the social bonds and commitments become less important and therefore the social conditions of self-realization, the need to be free and autonomous, become paradoxically threatened. He also points to a further paradox in the self-realization discourse, namely the conflicting demands of realizing oneself while also being constantly in

need to change and develop.

Hence, in the post-modern world everything is in flux; everything is in making and remaking. The old physical, territorial and psychological boundaries are broken down just to be replaced by other temporary barriers.

Not just the individuals are on the move but also the finishing lines of the tracks they run on and the running tracks themselves. 'Disembeddment' is now an experience which is likely to be repeated an unknown number of times in the course of individual life, since few or any 'beds' for 're-embedding' look solid enough to sustain the stability of long occupation. [...] There is no prospect of 'final re-embeddment' at the end road; being on the road has become the permanent way of life disembedded (now chronically disembedded) individuals" (Bauman, 2001, p. 125).

In the midst of all this flexibility and change the post-modern people seek to make sense of their lives and try to find anchor points that would give them some stability and security. Instead of achieving and acquiring an identity, they are always in the process of searching, constructing, making and remaking. A sense of self and identity is something to struggle for, something that needs to be negotiated. Often these struggles result in unwanted outcomes of feeling lost, depressed and empty (Brinkmann, 2008). In the ever-changing flow of experiences people become someone just to understand that they need to become someone else in order to find a match between their personal aspirations and the changing world around them. This search for stability is combined with a need to 'live truly'. Individuals are pushed to find something that is right for them, to be true to themselves, to live fully and completely. And so, in order to deal with this anxiety and with the hope of finding the true purpose of their lives, post-modern people go literally or symbolically on pilgrimages, just like the brave protagonists of Paulo Coelho's popular novels (e.g. "The alchemist" 1999a; "The pilgrimage" 1999b).

The so-called omnipresent identity crisis of the post-modern era is taken as a warrant for the need to investigate issues of identity in the current

research project. While it is acknowledged that the quest for certainty and security may be challenging in the current historical period, it is nevertheless assumed that people's need for stability, coherence and purposefulness as opposed to fragmentation and unsteadiness has not changed. Hence, being informed by this general discourse of permanent identity crisis, the current investigation looks at young people's life journeys as they struggle to make their decisions in the present, based on their experiences with the world and themselves in the past that would allow them to make sense of the world and themselves in it also in the future.

2.2 Debates concerning European identity

In addition to the discussions concerning the omnipresent identity crisis of the post-modern era, the current study is also positioned within the debates relating to the European identity. Since its establishment the European Union (EU) has endeavoured to promote an ideology that there should be a close union among the peoples of Europe. A primary aim of the European integration has been to create conditions for durable peace among European countries through positive (mostly economic) interdependence and a common supranational identification with the Union (Licata & Klein, 2002). However, the questions about the existence and nature of this common European identity that is the basis of the EU's stability and legitimacy, in addition to its fundamentally democratic character, have been raised (Bruter, 2003). When conceptualizing the nature and content of European identity, it has usually been suggested that it is different from ethno-cultural identity due to the different subjective factors of identification (Weiler, 1997). While ethno-cultural identity of one's homeland is related to the common genealogy, cultural heritage, traditions and sometimes also common language, European identity is usually understood as referring to the democratic nation state and citizenship (Peters, 2002). However, Bruter (2003) has suggested that European identity includes both of these aspects: European civic identity refers to identification with the European political system, while the cultural identity refers to individuals' perception that other Europeans are culturally closer to them than non-Europeans. This conceptualization is similar to Hilson's (2007) view, who sees European

identity as consisting of “vertical, supranational political identity with the EU and its institutions” and “transnational, horizontal identity with citizens resident in other member states” (Hilson, 2007, p. 539). He argues that while there are signs of the existence of the former, the latter is still not evident.

An important area of discussions related to the European identity circles around the basis and promotion of this common identity. Some argue that the common EU rights the citizen can enjoy will lead to the identification with the Union (Weiler, 1997; Hilson, 2007; Pinxten, Cornelis & Rubinstein, 2007). The critics of this idea have argued that this may not be the case due to the difficulty in endorsing many of the rights and/or due to the execution of these rights on the national level, connecting the citizens to their Union therefore in an indirect manner (Hilson, 2007). It has also been proposed that repeated reference to the rights that EU citizens have, or adding new rights to the list, can send the citizens a message of these rights being needed and therefore somehow threatened, which “is not exactly the stuff which will make them closer to their Union or Community” (Weiler, 1997, p. 501).

While the discussion of the EU citizens’ rights seems to be related to the identification with the EU as a political institution (i.e. vertical, supranational or civic component of European identity), the basis of the cultural (i.e. horizontal and transnational) component of European identity seems to be related to perceived cultural similarities between Europeans. It seems not to be yet understood what it means to be European in cultural terms and what are “the European transnational affinities to shared values which transcend the ethno-national diversity” (Weiler, 1997, p. 510). It is also not clear how these shared values should be promoted. Providing the EU with a comprehensive set of symbols (e.g. a flag, an anthem, a national day, design of Euro banknotes) seems to be one way of flagging (Billig, 1995) the European identity and therefore reinforcing the citizens’ sense of belonging to their united political community (Bruter, 2003). Increasing the EU citizens’ intercultural negotiation and communication skills through training is another option in reaching the goals of building a multicultural, yet united Community (Pinxten et al., 2007). However,

questions about promoting the common European identity at the expense of creating xenophobic attitudes towards non-Europeans, especially immigrants in Europe (Licata & Klein, 2002), adds another layer to this discussion.

The debates circling around the issues of cultural European identity are also closely intertwined with the issue of protecting the cultural diversity within the Union. Chiefly, the aim of the European integration was not to create a single state, but to build a union of many different nations (Weiler, 1997). Hence, the European citizenship and the related transnational identity should complement and not replace the national citizenship and ethno-cultural identity. Despite this repeated declaration, the monoculturalism of the EU in terms of a common European identity, and the multiculturalism are often perceived as dichotomous, albeit unproductive options (Pinxten et al., 2007). While research seems to suggest that different political identities (e.g. European and ethno-cultural) can be complementary (Bruter, 2003), much work still needs to be done in order to understand how these identities are created, maintained and altered in the context of continuous multicultural contact.

2.3 Debates concerning Estonian identity

The debates of Estonian identity in the post-Soviet era seem to be located on two main dimensions: Estonians' self-understanding in relation to the 'good West' – 'bad East' dichotomy; and Estonians' self-understandings in relation to the European integration and common European identity. The main arguments of these discourses are presented in the following sections.

One of the defining dimensions of the post-Soviet Estonian identity search is related to the East-West dichotomy (Berg, 2002). For a country that has over the centuries been ruled and culturally influenced by the Danes, the Germans, the Swedes, the Poles and by the Russians, the choice in terms of appropriate cultural-historical references seems to be manifold. Nevertheless, if in the past, during the period of the nation building in the 19th century, the need to distance oneself from 700 years of German rule was high on the agenda, the escape from the Russian influences seems to be the main aim in the current, post-

communist identity construction (Brüggemann, 2003; Lehti, 2005). The historical links with German and Nordic culture that connect Estonia to Europe are therefore emphasized. The European roots of Estonian culture as an assumed antipode of the Russian influences seemed to be favoured also at the expense of the pure ethno-cultural identity. This latter self-definition is related to the concept *meie maa* (our land) and expressed in the cultural traditions of people who have lived on the Estonian soil for 5000 years (Berg, 2002). However, the post-Cold War Estonian identity seems to be first and foremost Nordic-Germanic (and therefore also Christian-Lutheran), not dating back that much to the period before the German crusades in the 13th century (Lehti, 2005).

Estonian German-Nordic identity aspirations are also related to the common identity of Baltic States that is attributed to the three countries positioned on the shores of the Baltic Sea. It has been claimed that while acknowledging the historical misfortune of being occupied by Soviet Russia that links the three states together, the cultural and historical connections between them are very slim (Brüggemann, 2003). While the old Livonia as a province of Germany, covering present-day Estonian and Latvian territories, inhabited by Baltic Germans, creates certain cultural and historical (although not linguistic) connections between Estonia and Latvia, the use of the term Baltic States to refer to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania has its origins in geopolitics and imperialist and economic interests of the Russian Empire and the later USSR. The Russian concept *Pribaltika* is therefore a Russian attribution that the independent Estonia seems to contest while claiming its Nordic identity (Noreen & Sjöstedt, 2004)¹.

Hence, in this self-understanding that is emphasizing the links with the West, any connections with Russian cultural heritage seem to be denied as an undesirable remainder of the 50 years of communist occupation and explicit Russification efforts from Moscow (Berg, 2002). The success of Estonians in

¹ However, people living in the Baltic States would probably not contest the term *nash zapad* (our West) used by former Soviet compatriots to describe the better living conditions in *Pribaltiiskii krai* (Baltic States).

preserving their language and cultural traditions under the Soviet rule has been investigated in many studies (see Valk & Karu, 2001; Valk & Karu, 2004; Vihalemm, 2004). It has been suggested that the opportunity to acquire Estonian-medium education and practice most national traditions could have played a crucial role in preserving ethno-cultural identity during the occupation (Vihalemm, 2004). Vetik (2003) has suggested that national culture was an important mechanism in differentiating indigenous people from Russian immigrants, placing the former higher on a cultural scale with respect to the latter, and therefore creating a positive self-image for Estonians. The concept 'our land' mentioned above that is currently downplayed to emphasize the Nordic-Germanic cultural connections has always been important in differentiating between native Estonians and immigrant Russians. The fact that 'they' have not lived on this land for many centuries sets them apart from 'us'. It has been suggested that this distinction is not merely psychological, but also spatial: 'they' live mostly in cities, whereas Estonians, being true to their connection with the land, live in the countryside or at least have a country-house to escape to during the weekends and summer holidays (Berg, 2002).

Thus, the tradition to distance Estonia from Russian influences was not born with the second independence, but was repeatedly rehearsed during the years of occupation when the common enemy provided Estonians with a sense of solidarity discourse. However, it has been suggested that the Russophobia has decreased in public in recent years (Kuus, 2007). The inter-ethnic conflicts have calmed down during the 1990s² to be replaced by intra-ethnic social tensions³, bringing the focus away from the perceived cultural threat of the Russian-

² Inter-ethnic tensions have become acute again due to the events related to the relocation of the WWII monument in Tallinn in April 2007.

³ Estonian society seems to be divided along the lines of social position, where *esimene Eesti* (first Estonia) includes citizens who have adapted successfully to the new free market economy and rapid economic growth, while people belonging to *teine Eesti* (second Estonia) have found it difficult to let go of the Soviet mentality and therefore found themselves socially and economically in less respected and secure positions (Brüggemann, 2003); see also Vihalemm, 2007 for a discussion about Estonia as a society in transition, and Donskis, 2005 for an account about similar societal processes in Lithuania).

speaking population in Estonia. Furthermore, Russian troops were withdrawn from Estonia in 1994 and ten years later the Estonian NATO and EU membership was finalized. As a result, the political rhetoric that used to picture Russia as a constant threat to Estonian sovereignty and security has changed to focus on more soft/postmodern European security issues, such as environmental concerns, terrorism, trafficking in drugs, people, arms etc. (Noreen & Sjöstedt, 2004; Holtom, 2005). In this new phase of the country's development, a new discourse that is not looking backwards to the misfortunate Soviet past, but pictures Estonia as a successful, future-oriented and economically growing knowledge-based society, is being created (Lehti, 2005). This new discourse is placing Estonia together with other new EU member-states, the UK and Denmark in the 'new Europe' group as opposed to Germany and France (and previously Spain) which by refusing to support the USA in its war against Iraq, have been termed the 'old Europe' (Joenniemi, 2005; Lehti, 2005). This future-oriented, positive picture of Estonia also uses the concept 'gatekeeper hinge' to demonstrate the country's in-between role as a gateway connecting East and West or maritime Europe and heartland Eurasia. While some authors seem to still emphasize the possibility of closing the gate if necessary (i.e. the 'old Russophobic' discourse) (Brüggemann, 2003), others stress more the possibility to use the gateway as a channel for cooperation (Holtom, 2005).

While the re-establishment of Estonian Western cultural links as opposed to Eastern influences has been one of the dominant discourses in Estonian identity construction in recent years, this idea of becoming Europeans again has its counterpart. While being perceived as a positive and natural outcome of independence, this aspiration is intertwined with fear of losing Estonian-ness as a result of European integration. Based on their research findings, Vihalemm and Keller (2001) state that "Estonians' historical experience of cultural resistance is more likely to have created a ready basis for the acceptance of anything from the West than it has helped to construct a new type of identity to resist cultural levelling" (p. 83). Furthermore, Kirch (2004) has suggested that the central feature of Estonian identity – the self-categorization related to language and ethnicity – would start to lose its centrality, and would be replaced by general

values of European-ness during the next generations. European citizenship has given the Russians living in Estonian territory equal rights with Estonians in terms of language, work and study opportunities. Estonians themselves are increasingly emigrating to the West to find better study and work opportunities. The lack of a local workforce and growing economy requires an influx of foreign workers. Therefore it seems that the famous Young Estonia's slogan from the beginning of the 20th century has been reversed: the issue at stake may be to become Europeans, while remaining also Estonians⁴.

The previous discussion has been aimed at pointing out how Estonian identity is constructed in relation to relevant others. Two main dialogue partners were defined: the Eastern-Russian and Western-European other. The relationship with the first other is clearly dominated by the distancing efforts, even if in recent years the fear of this other has decreased and questions of integrating some aspects of that other and creating a bicultural society have been raised. This distancing is expanded also to the idea of Estonia as a Baltic State as a categorization that has its roots in Russian territorial considerations. The relationship with West/Europe seems to be somewhat more ambiguous. On the one hand, the cultural-historical links with Europe, especially German-Nordic connections, are emphasized in order to create a basis for Estonian European-ness. On the other hand, European integration is seen as a possible threat to the ethno-cultural identity. While being far from framing this other as an enemy, the European other is sometimes perceived as possibly risky, flagging up the need to keep a distance from it.

2.4 Collective discourses about identity in this study

The three thematic areas briefly outlined in this chapter have informed the current research project. The discourse of permanent identity crisis of the post-modern era

⁴ *Noor Eesti* (Young Estonia) was a literary movement group that played an important role in forming Estonian national consciousness in the years leading to the WWI. Here the reference is made to the slogan used by Gustav Suits (1883-1956), a leading figure of Young Estonia: „Let us be Estonians, but let us become Europeans!“

has been used to justify the general need to investigate issues of omnipresent identity construction. While the author's own ethno-cultural background has influenced the choice of focusing on Estonians' experiences of living abroad, the debates around European and Estonian identities have also been used to explain why Estonians as an ethnic group may represent an interesting case in the European context to investigate individuals' identity struggles.

All these group-level dynamics and socio-political debates on the collective level as well as at the European trans-national and Estonian national level find their arena at the individual level, which is the focal point of the present research. These are the collective voices that influence personal sense-making. The study reported in this dissertation seeks to understand how these general macro-level debates are played out in the specific life-experiences of the individuals. It does not endeavour to make generalized claims about European or Estonian identities as such. Instead, it looks at these issues through the prism of an individual's life in its complexity, trying to understand how individuals use these general collective discourses in constructing, maintaining and altering their self-understandings. Therefore the study does not focus solely on the issues of ethnicity and nationalism. While being important nexus points for many other topics, they are not the only matters the study participants have to deal with when rebuilding their lives in a foreign country. Hence, in this thesis the reader will meet a young academician who, in trying to build his professional and personal life in a cosmopolitan city, finds in the common European identity an escape from a somewhat closed-minded Estonian mentality. The reader will also come across students who, while searching for a balance between work and studies and security in a rather insecure life abroad, struggle to make others understand that they do not want to be considered as one of the many Eastern-European immigrants in the UK. The dissertation will also offer an encounter with a woman who, despite her deeply-rooted patriotism, feels ashamed of her homeland due to what she calls "the extensive ambition and arrogance of that small country". Therefore the issues of being a European or being an Estonian, as well as identity struggles in an ever-changing globalizing world are reoccurring in the present study and they are paid attention to as they emerge, being wrapped around other

issues in the participants' lives.

CHAPTER 3

IDENTITY – ENTITY OR PROCESS?

3.1 Introduction

The present chapter looks at different conceptualizations of identity that are currently prevailing in this research field. The chapter has two main purposes: to offer a brief and schematic overview of different theories in the field by contrasting two perspectives, and to identify ideas in both of these theoretical approaches that can be useful for the conceptualization of identity.

The conceptual field of identity is many-sided. However, when considering the underlying assumptions of different models in this diverse theoretical landscape two general perspectives emerge: an individualistic and essentialist view of identity, and a constructionist view of identity. In broad terms the former considers identity as a pregiven entity that exists in the world, therefore neglecting the need of showing how that entity emerges in the process of human functioning. In conjunction with this essentialist view, person and context are treated as related, yet ontologically separated realms. As the focus of these theories is on the individual, this approach could also be called individualistic. In contrast, the constructionist approach of identity denies the pregiven existence of

identity. Instead, it directs the attention to the process by way of which identity is produced by collective discourses that individuals engage with in their everyday functioning within the society.

In order to demonstrate the focus on entity as opposed to the focus on process, several specific models and theories will be discussed in the chapter. The first part of the chapter focuses on two essentialist and individualistic theories of identity, namely social identity theory and identity theory. The current study is informed by the issues of ethno-cultural and trans-national identity negotiations and looks at identity construction in the case of young people who have moved from one socio-cultural context to another. Therefore, the chapter also includes a brief discussion of the theoretical approaches that deal with ethnic identity and acculturation. As these theories share the underlying assumptions of social identity theory, they are discussed as part of the entity-oriented perspective. The last part of the chapter deals with different ideas within the social constructionism approach, in order to highlight the assumptions of the process-centred perspective.

As will become clear from the chapter, the contrast between entity-oriented and process-oriented perspectives is not clear-cut in reality. Essentialists do consider also the process of identity formation and constructionists do pay attention to the outcomes of the construction process. Nevertheless, the essentialist and individualist assumptions direct the focus to the entity-like nature of identity, while social constructionists' interest in the collective discourses and their functioning centre the attention to the identity construction process. Both of these focuses are considered one-sided and therefore limited here. Hence, taking into account the underlying assumptions of the contrasted theoretical views, both of them are rejected here as the starting point of the present investigation.

Nevertheless, there are many ideas in both theoretical perspectives that can be valuable and useful for the conceptualization of identity. Therefore, the following discussion is not meant only as a critique of the contrasted theoretical approaches, but also as a way of highlighting interesting and fruitful ideas within those conceptual frames.

3.2 Individualistic and essentialist theories of identity

3.2.1 Social identity theory and identity theory

3.2.1.1 Identity and its formation in identity theory

Identity theory, ties the notion of identity to the idea of social networks to which a person belongs, and to the roles one occupies in those social networks (Howard, 2000; Stryker & Burke, 2000). As this theoretical perspective focuses on the role behaviour as the basis of identity formation, it has sometimes also been called role identity theory (Stets & Burke, 2000).

Identity theory considers identities to be shared social meanings that persons attribute to themselves and to others in relation to a particular role (Burke & Reitzes, 1991). Hogg, Terry and White (1995) define role identities as “self-conceptions, self-referent cognitions, or self-definitions that people apply to themselves as a consequence of the structural role position they occupy, and through a process of labeling or self-definition as a member of a particular social category” (p. 256). According to identity theory each social role is related to a set of expectations and meanings about the way a person, acting in that role, should behave, feel and think. Identity theory sees identities as internalizations of those role expectations (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Identity is conceptualized as cognitive schema, as internally stored information that serves as a framework in order to interpret one’s behaviour and experience in a certain role. Identity theory claims that persons have as many identities as they have different social groups to which they belong and with which they interact. Among the many identities the person has some are more important than others. Different identities are tied together to form the self which is understood as the hierarchical organization of a set of identities ordered by centrality or salience (Burke & Reitzes, 1991). The salience of a role identity is determined by the person’s commitment to a certain role (Hogg et al., 1995).

According to identity theory, identities are social products (Burke & Reitzes, 1991). That is, cognitive schemas about role expectations that a person comes to acquire about oneself and others, have their origin in the social

interaction. Identities are internalized shared meanings. By observing others' behaviour in a role an individual creates an idea of a standard behaviour in that role, that thereafter becomes integrated into one's cognitive space. Stets and Burke (2000) emphasize that some negotiation is always involved in formation of role-based identities. People do not just copy the behaviour or thinking and feeling style of others in the same role into their understanding of a role (i.e. role standard), but they try to combine and connect the expectations and meanings obtained through interaction with other roles they have and therefore come up with a unique set of role-based identities. Nevertheless, identities are still considered to be symbolic, that is they have a common meaning for many people and they call up in one person the same responses as they would call up in others (Burke & Reitzes, 1991).

It is argued here that while identity theory claims the role identities to have socio-genetic nature, the theory offers little insights about the processes of role-identity construction. The process of internalization needs not only to be stated, but also explained. How identities as cognitive schemas become constructed in social interaction? What is the role of an individual in that process? What is the role of the social other in that process? How is the negotiation between person's existing cognitive schemas and new ideas played out? How does a cognitive schema that is related to a specific role emerge in person's consciousness? These are important questions that remain unanswered in identity theory. In line with the essentialist assumptions, the emergence of identity in social interaction is taken as a pre-given that needs no further explanations. Therefore it seems that the focus of attention is not on the process of identity construction but rather on the functioning of identity as an outcome of that process. The theory seeks to explain how different identities fit together, how they form a hierarchical structure and influence a person's behaviour. Hence, the person with his/her set of identities is in the centre of analysis and not the processes by way of which identities become part of an individual's personal meaning space.

3.2.1.2 Identity and its formation in social identity theory

Social identity theory (SIT), as the most prominent social psychological theory of identity, focuses on membership in social categories or social groups as the basis of identities, rather than role identification which is considered to be the basis of social identity in identity theory. SIT proposes that individuals use social categories in order to simplify their environment as well as to define themselves (Niens & Cairns, 2003). According to SIT, social identity can be understood as membership in a certain groups, as identification with a group or social category and as person's knowledge and belief that he or she belongs to a social group or category (Hogg et al., 1995; Stryker & Burke, 2000). The social category into which one belongs offers a definition of what kind of person one is according to the defining characteristics of the social category. It offers a description of the ways a person, as a member of that social category, should behave, think and feel. It is important to notice that SIT regards social groups as collectives of similar individuals, who identify with each other, see themselves and others in similar ways and hold similar views, which are in contrast with the out-group (Stets & Burke, 2000). Thus, the basis of group-based identity is related to the uniformity of perceptions and actions of group members. Similarly to identity theory, SIT proposes that people have an entire repertoire of identities that are linked to memberships in different social groups. The social identities one holds vary in their importance in the self-concept and all together form a complex social self.

According to Hogg and her colleagues (1995), SIT offers not only an understanding of the functioning and structure of social identity, but also explains the socio-cognitive processes that underlie the formation of social identity. There are two main processes playing an important part in the formation of social identity: self-categorization and social comparison. Self-categorization is conceptualized as person's identification with the social category which makes the person to concentrate on the similarities between one and the ingroup, while accentuating the perceived differences between oneself and the out-group. Categorization makes the boundaries between ingroup and out-group more sharp and visible, it produces group-specific stereotypes, normative perceptions and actions. Social comparison, on the other hand, has to do with evaluating the

ingroup and out-group on dimensions that lead the ingroup to be judged positively, while the out-group is judged negatively. Social comparison functions as a way of making the ingroup norms and stereotypes favour the ingroup. The process of social comparison is related to the central thesis of SIT, namely to the understanding that individuals strive to have and maintain a positive self-concept or to enhance their self-esteem (Negy, Shreve, Jensen & Uddin, 2003; Niens & Cairns, 2003). Therefore the self-enhancement is believed to guide the process of social comparison that should lead to the positive social identity. SIT acknowledges that positive social identity is not always achieved with social comparison and proposes that in those situations, persons use different identity management strategies in order to cope with the negative social identity.

Self-categorization, as the main underlying process of social identity formation proposed by SIT, has gained a lot of attention within this theoretical perspective. In fact, a separate branch of SIT, named self-categorization theory, has become an influential theoretical framework for related research. According to Hogg et al. (1995), self-categorization theory seeks to elaborate in detail “the operation of the categorization process as the cognitive basis of group behaviour” (p. 260). A central concept in understanding the self-categorization process is depersonalization, which refers to the idea that people, being members of a group, tend to see themselves and others as similar members of the group, rather than unique individuals. The concept emphasises that in the formation of group-identity the focus shifts from personal identity that stresses the uniqueness of the individual, to the social identity that focuses on group membership. Another important notion in the conceptualization of categorization process is that of prototype. It is seen as “subjective representation of the defining attributes of a social category, which is actively constructed from relevant social information” (Hogg et al., 1995, p. 261). People actively use prototypes, which are considered to be a set of features characterizing a member of the group, to evaluate the behaviour of self and others. Self-categorization theory emphasizes the dynamic nature of prototypes, which are constructed by members of the group as a way of combining and managing different ideas about ingroup and out-group in order to maximize the intragroup similarity and intergroup difference.

The previous discussion demonstrates that the processes by way of which the individuals create group-identities are in the centre of attention in SIT. The criticism put forward here does not concern this general orientation to the processes, nor is it about the processes proposed by SIT *per se*. These seem as interesting ways of explaining group behaviour from the individual's perspective. Rather, the criticism has to do with the kind of processes SIT seeks to explain.

According to the view advocated here, all the processes that SIT proposes are individual-centred. They start from the individual and are directed outwards towards the other. The question for SIT seems to be, how people's perception of themselves as group members can be explained on the individual cognitive level. The social other or a collective meaning space is taken into account only as a separated realm with which the individual interacts in these explanations. It is seen as a background of individual's functioning. Therefore, the questions, such as how does the individual mind have the access to the social information based on which the group-identities become constructed, are not considered. The individual's access to the social information is taken as a pre-given and the focus is just on the cognitive operations that are performed in individual's cognitive system with that information.

Hence, the point made here is that SIT neglects certain important questions by separating individuals from their socio-cultural context and by starting its explanation from the individual. The idea that people perceive themselves as members of groups and therefore have group-identities should not be taken as a pre-given. Similarly, the idea that individuals have access and use social information to create cognitive constructions should not be taken as a claim that needs no further explanation. Instead, the more basic question of how identities emerge in person/environment interaction should also be addressed.

3.2.1.3 Identity as an entity in identity theory and social identity theory

Focusing on identities as entities in people's heads separate from the social context from which they have emerged, has led individualistic theories to the 'discovery' of many different types of identities. Probably the most influential

typology put forward by self-categorization theory, is the distinction between personal and social identity (Turner & Reynolds, 2004). According to Terry (2001) social identity as “the social component of the self-concept [...] derives from memberships in social groups and social categories, and contrasts with one’s personal identity, which reflects one’s characteristics as a unique individual” (p. 203). While social identity makes individuals behave in terms of the group, personal identity sets them apart from all others (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Importantly, the difference between social and personal identity lies in the content, not in the origin. According to Ashmore and colleagues (Ashmore, Deaux & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004), identifications that are not related to group membership (i.e. personal identity) are also social in their origin. In this respect it would be helpful to use the term collective identity instead of social identity to refer to group membership⁵.

The distinction between personal and collective identity has opened up further discussion about the types of identities that are needed to explain individual’s functioning in the social world. This discussion is mostly focused around dividing the collective component of identity into further categories according to the target of identification. Worchel and his colleagues’ four-dimensional model of identity (Worchel, Iuzzini, Coutant & Ivaldi, 2000; Worchel & Coutant, 2004) that differentiates between personal identity, group membership (i.e. social identity), intra-group identity (i.e. person’s position within the group) and group identity (i.e. group as a separate entity has its own identity), is one option for expanding the typology. However, the most influential addition to the initial two-loci concept of identity orientation has been proposed by Brewer and Gardner (1996), who argue that self should also be considered as “an interpersonal relationship partner” (Brickson & Brewer, 2001, p. 50). Thus, relational identity, that concentrates on dyadic relationships and is related to other-directedness and acting for other’s benefit, should be included as a separate identity orientation.

⁵ The two terms, *social* and *collective* are used interchangeably in this dissertation.

In addition to those general conceptualizations, identity types can be classified also on the basis of different identification targets. Thus, studies dealing with ethnic identity and studies investigating national identity, are arguably dealing with two different types of identities. In the former case, identification with one's country of origin is in the focus, whereas the latter concentrates on understanding individual's identity in relation to the country of residence (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind & Vedder, 2001). Similarly ethnic identity and racial identity are considered to be different types of identity (Helms, 2007), even if the difference in the meaning of those concepts is not always clear neither for researchers nor for study participants (Cokley, 2007).

This orientation towards typologies creates an image of identities as static entities that can be described and categorised. There are at least two problems with this image. First, the ever-expanding list of different types of identities poses questions about the inter-relatedness of these cognitive structures. Recent theorizing proposes that individual identities cannot be conceptualized as one-dimensional independent types that influence the behaviour of an individual separately, as individualistic theories seem to suggest. Rather, self-conceptualization includes multiple, inter-sectional identities functioning simultaneously to create an idiosyncratic pattern of self-understandings (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 2001). The static, individual-centred, measurement-oriented typologies that IT and SIT offer are limited in capturing a multifaceted and dynamic phenomenon of identification that people use to make sense of themselves and the world around them.

Second, when identities are considered in this static entity ontological manner, the questions about the change in relation to individual's changing life-circumstances emerge. Once the identities become created are they as cognitive schemas stored and re-used every time the situation requires or are they always re-constructed anew? More specifically, do people go around having a ready-made ethnic identity in their head, or do they re-formulate these self-definitions when it is needed? These are the questions that remain unanswered in individualistic identity theories.

3.2.1.4 Summary of the limitations of identity theory and social identity theory

Although social identity theory and identity theory have treated the collective in an over-individualized manner, their importance in pointing out the role of social other in the formation of self-concept should not be underestimated. In addition to that, concepts such as personal, collective and relational identity have been influential in opening up space for further discussions within individualistic approach, while being used also in other research traditions (e.g. discourse psychology, see Hardy, Lawrence & Grant, 2005).

While the previous discussion identified those ideas as interesting and important, it also pointed to several limitations within the social identity and identity theories. First, it was argued, that while both SIT and IT acknowledge the socio-genetic nature of identity, they offer little insights about the processes of identity construction. The emergence of identity in the social interaction is taken as pre-given in these theories and not explained. The proposed processes underlying identity formation are individual-centred and pay little attention to the role of social other in that process.

Second, it was pointed out that while both SIT and IT see identities as cognitive schemas, these are conceptualised as relatively stable entities. This view seems contradictory with the understanding of human consciousness as dynamic flow of thoughts, where different semiotic constructions are always in the process of making and remaking. Disappointingly, the emphasis of SIT and IT seems to be on providing ever-more detailed descriptions and typologies of identity, not on explaining how and why people use these semiotic constructions for their successful functioning in the world.

3.2.2 Acculturation and stage theories of identity

3.2.2.1 Acculturation theory – cultures as entities to accept or reject

Conceptualizations of acculturation can be traced back to Plato (Rudmin, 2003). In the contemporary acculturation psychology, Berry's fourfold theory (Berry, 1990), formulated in the 1980s, has become the most popular. It deals with the changes in cultural attitudes, values and behaviours that result from sustained

contact between different cultures. According to Phinney and colleagues (Phinney et al., 2001) acculturation is the process that explains the changing relationship between a person's ethnic identity (i.e. identification with the culture of origin) and national identity (i.e. identification with the host culture). Berry proposes that acculturation involves two psychological dimensions: the desire to maintain one's ethnic identity; and the perceived value of interacting with other cultural groups (i.e. out-group orientation) (Giang & Wittig, 2006). Earlier researchers suggested that these two aspects, sometimes also called enculturation and acculturation respectively (Kim & Omizo, 2006) should be considered as two extremes of one continuum, therefore advocating a one-dimensional model according to which assimilation into host culture leads to the loss of ethnic culture (Kus, 2004). However, recent theorizing proposes that the two dimensions can also be independent and therefore interrelated, leading to a bi-dimensional model of acculturation (Phinney & Ong, 2007). The intersection of those two dimensions leads to four acculturation strategies: integration or bi-culturalism (the individual becomes proficient in host culture, while retaining the proficiency in ethnic culture); assimilation (accepting host culture at the cost of losing ethnic culture); separation (involvement with one's ethnic culture and retreat from interactions with host culture); and marginalization (individual is not interested in having proficiency neither in one's ethnic nor in the host culture) (Sussman, 2000). It has also been proposed that the marginalization strategy could be divided into two different acculturation orientations: anomie which accounts for the rejection of both ethnic and host culture, and individualism that refers to people who prefer to identify themselves as individuals rather than as members of any social group (Bourhis, Moise, Perreault & Senecal, 1997). Rudmin (2003) has criticised the fact that the four acculturation types are merely theoretical constructions and not research-based categories, suggesting that the bi-cultural model of acculturation produces logically 16 and not only four acculturation types. Nevertheless, the dominant fourfold acculturation theory suggests that from the point of view of psychological adaptation and well-being integration is the most, and marginalization the least beneficial strategy (Giang & Wittig, 2006), although this claim has not been clearly supported by the research and alternative accounts have

been proposed (see Rudmin, 2003 for an extensive critique of the fourfold model).

Acculturation has usually been analysed from the immigrant's, sojourner's or minority group member's perspective (Rudmin, 2003; Giang & Wittig, 2006). The host culture has usually been considered as an entity that needs to be accepted or rejected and ethnic culture has been seen as the only element in that relationship that is open to change. The dominant group's acculturation strategies, if they have been conceptualized, have only dealt with attitudes towards minority groups' acculturation (Giang & Wittig, 2006). The notion of mutual acculturation that seeks to explain how sustained contact changes both dominant and non-dominant culture has been proposed only recently (Molina, Wittig & Giang, 2004). One of the few acculturation models that takes into account the dynamic interplay between minority groups' acculturation strategies, as well as the orientation of the host culture members, is Bourhis' (1997) interactive acculturation model. Nevertheless, acculturation is also in this model considered to be an individual-centred phenomenon that deals with the change in individual's attitudes, values and behaviours. The culture, both ethnic and host culture, as a socio-historical context of individual's change is left undefined and the mechanisms explaining how the change on individual level leads to changes on collective level are not considered.

Additionally, it has been pointed out in recent relevant literature that as the acculturation model is bi-directional, it is unable to account for multiple ethnic and/or national identities. Based on their research on acculturation of Russian-speaking Jewish refugees from the former Soviet Union to the United States, Persky and Birman (2005) point out the need to expand acculturation framework in order to allow conceptualization of multiple simultaneous identities (in this case Russian, Jewish and American). Similarly, Bourhis et al. (1997) point out that acculturating immigrants may not find themselves in contact only with the dominant host majority, but need to consider their relationship also with indigenous host minorities or established immigrant communities within the host culture (e.g. Mexican American in the United States). However, even if these authors advocate a multidirectional model of acculturation they consider cultures

as relatively homogeneous groups that interact and influence each other. Cultures are seen as distinct entities and the question seems to be how many of those entities need to be taken into account, while the question how to understand identities that are related to fuzzy, inter-sectional and overlapping cultural groups, remains unexplored.

3.2.2.2 Stage theories – from exploring to achieving an identity

Many different stage or developmental theories of identity have been proposed over the years. While some of them deal with ethnic identity (e.g. Phinney, 1989; Quintana, 1998) others focus specifically on racial identity (e.g. Helms & Piper, 1994; Vandiver, Cross, Worrell & Fhagen-Smith, 2002). Based on social identity theory, racial or ethnic groups are considered as important social categories that people identify with and use to define themselves. As mentioned earlier, the difference between racial and ethnic identities is a debated and unsettled matter (Trimble, 2007). As all of these theories, irrespective of whether they deal with ethnic or racial identity, share the same underlying assumptions (Quintana, 2007), they will be discussed together in this section.

One of the first developmental perspectives of ethnic identity formation was proposed by Phinney (1989). Her model is based on Erikson's (1968) ego identity model for it describes identity formation as a process striving towards a stable sense of ethnicity (i.e. achieved ethnic identity). It is also based on Marcia's (1980) model of personal identity formation that proposes the development of identity based on two processes: exploration and commitment. These processes are the basis of different identity statuses: identity diffusion (i.e. no exploration, no commitment), identity forecloser (i.e. commitment without exploration), moratorium (i.e. exploration without commitment) and achieved identity (i.e. exploration and commitment). According to Phinney (Phinney & Ong, 2007): "The process of ethnic identity formation involves the construction over time of one's sense of self as a group member and of one's attitudes and understandings associated with group membership" (p. 275). Similarly to Erikson and Marcia, Phinney links the stages of ethnic identity development with the maturation and life-cycle of the individual, conceptualizing adolescence as the period of intense

exploration that should lead through possible periods of foreclosure and/or moratorium to an achieved and relatively stable sense of ethnicity by adulthood (Phinney, 1990).

Other researchers have proposed similar models of ethnic or racial identity that conceptualize identity development as a multistage movement towards a relatively stable and positive self-image. According to Quintana (1998), racial-ethnic identity progresses from something that is passively acquired to something that needs to be explored and thereafter integrated into one's self-concept in a personally meaningful way. According to his theory, children's racial-ethnic cognitions develop from superficial physical characteristics, through understanding the literal characteristics related to certain ethnicity (such as language), and through understanding the social implications of belonging to a certain ethnic-racial category, into a more collectively-oriented awareness of inter- and intra-group dynamics (Lee & Quintana, 2005). Cross' nigrescence theory describes different types of black identity that correspond to different stages in racial identity development (Vandiver et al., 2002). Differently from Helms' racial identity theory (Helms & Piper, 1994), that seems to suggest one route of identity development from passively acquired external self-definition that devalues blackness into internalization of positive racial-group commitment, Cross' model suggests that encounters with racial discrimination and exploration of one's racial identity can lead to different identity profiles (e.g. internalization stage can be characterized by multi-culturalist identity or black nationalist identity). The main difference between these theoretical models seems to lie in the importance that is given to the discrimination experience: while models of racial identity (e.g. Cross and Helms) seem to emphasise the experience of discrimination as a trigger of identity exploration and point out the need of preparation against discrimination, ethnic identity models (e.g. Phinney and Quintana) seem to pay less attention to this (Quintana, 2007). Despite these differences, the models seem to be based on similar underlying assumptions regarding the role of crisis and identity exploration in adolescence, and seeing identity formation as a stepwise movement from passively acquired external self-understanding towards a higher level of coherence, stability and positive self-

concept.

3.2.2.3 Limitations of acculturation and stage theories

While both acculturation theory and the previously discussed stage theories of ethnic-racial identity have been highly influential in generating theoretical discussions and empirical research, they seem to offer a relatively static and individual-centred approach of identity functioning. While focusing on the relationship between different cultures, acculturation theory seems to conceptualize culture as a static entity that is available for the person to accept or reject. Cultural groups, which are usually differentiated on the basis of language or country, are considered relatively homogeneous and stable over periods of time (Toomela, 2003). Cultural messages are treated as relatively fixed and stable entities and a uni-directional culture transfer model that does not assume changes neither in host culture nor in ethnic culture as a result of individual's engagement, is used (Valsiner, 2007b). Consequently, the individual's own agency, as well as specific processes by way of which new cultural messages become integrated into a person's psychological system, remains under-theorized and under-investigated in the research grounded in this theoretical tradition.

The general model of identity formation, i.e. the move from a steady-state condition to a stage of exploration as a result of some triggering event, which becomes resolved in a relatively stable, coherent and positive self-image, offered by stage theories is thought-provoking. However, it seems somewhat simplistic to link it directly to the life cycle of an individual. Despite the fact that ethnicity seems to be a relatively stable feature of person's self-concept, it seems more appropriate to conceptualize identity formation of post-modern individuals, who find themselves relocating and acculturating several times during a lifetime, as an ongoing process where the awareness-exploration-resolution cycle is continuously reproduced and re-experienced. Therefore, it seems that different stage theories as well as the acculturation theory explain identity development and functioning in a somewhat static and one-dimensional manner that does not allow understanding of the life experiences of post-modern people in their phenomenological richness.

3.3 Social constructionist view of identity

The emergence of social constructionism approach in psychology could be seen as a reaction against two ideas in psychological thinking. On the one hand, it is an attempt to conceptualize person's functioning in the post-modern era that is characterised by fragmentarity and instability, therefore making the "notion of stable, bounded and cohesive self" (Falmagne, 2004, p. 835) inappropriate for describing personal sense-making. On the other hand, it is a reaction against over-individualized treatment of individual-collective relationship (Gergen, 1989). As such it is a shift from self-in-isolation to self-in-relation perspective (Bartel & Dutton, 2001). Social constructionism argues against understanding the self as a self-contained, distinct entity, as an integrated whole and primary reality from which the rest, including society stems from (Sampson, 1989). For individual and society are not separated entities, but "society constitutes and inhabits the very core of whatever passes for personhood: each is interpenetrated by its other" (Sampson, 1989, p. 4). Identities arise out of "historical conditions, power relations and ongoing social processes" (Nagel, 2000, p. 114). The interrelatedness of individual and society becomes visible in social interactions where people utilize cultural-historical texts, while also reproducing these through their usage.

3.3.1 Discursive realities

Human reality is created in texts, discourses and conversations, while being also described by these. Culture-specific and historically defined discourse is the primary medium within which identities are created and have their currency (Shotter & Gergen, 1989). People are embedded in texts and discourses and the reality of their self-understandings and conceptions of others is derived from, constrained by, utilized in, distributed through, modelled upon and begun with culturally specific discourses (Shi-xu, 2006). The way we talk about ourselves and others is predetermined by already existing and established ways that we must use in order to make ourselves understandable, intelligible and justifiable (Slugoski & Ginsburg, 1989). The very fact that we talk about self and identity as something we have, as something that exists out there as a separate entity, is an example of

the functioning of the dominant western individual-centred text (Shotter, 1989).

According to social constructionism, the communicative space between people, where collectively and historically constructed texts are used and reproduced, constitutes the reality. Radical social constructionism denies the existence of ‘real’ or material reality beyond the socially constructed discourse and claims that the only accessible reality is the discursive one (Costall, 2007). Discourse as the usage of language is not simply a window to the mental reality, but it *is* the reality. The self is essentially discursive, just as well as identity is a discursive and social construction (Shotter, 1989; Shi-xu, 2006). In other words, the self as a text is “an intersection of discourses and a constellation of subject positions” (Falmagne, 2004, p. 835). Identity-making is a communicational practice and identities cannot be understood as something that exist outside individuals’ discursive practices (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). According to Shotter (1989): “*I* is a sign that is non-referential with respect to any extra-linguistic reality” (p. 139). As discursive objects that come to life only in discourses, identities are always in the process of making and remaking. They are multi-faceted and ever-changing. Thus, social constructionism allows exploring how individuals constantly define and redefine themselves, how their different identities in form of different voices become visible in the discourses they use.

3.3.2 Analysing discursive practices and powerful texts

Discourse becomes the main object of study in social constructionism approach that claims the sole existence of discursive reality. Texts, discourses and conversations describe the discursive reality, but also make clear what is proposed and allowed, what is desirable and what is deplored in a certain social context. Texts reveal social positions and identities that are available for people to claim for themselves and authorize for others. Billig (1995) points out that most of these remainders, or ‘flaggings’ of ideological possibilities that create one’s identity, remain unnoticed. They have become normal, or to use Billig’s terminology, banal elements of our daily lives that are not paid attention to. However, they exist to guide the construction and reproduction of our own and others’ self-understandings.

Thus, in social constructionism thinking, cultural-historical texts are not neutral resources for individuals to use. Instead, they constitute powerful means through which society imposes its will upon individuals and controls them (Parker, 1989). Thus, the social seems to be a more powerful partner in the individual-collective relationship (Michael, 1996). While criticising the fact that the social has power and control over individual's sense-making, social constructionism also admits its inevitability. Thus, the co-constructive nature of individual-collective relationship is in social constructionism not balanced, but biased towards the powerful social at the expense of the individual's agency.

3.3.3 Limitations of the social constructionist view

The emphasis that social constructionism places on texts, discourses and conversations is a valuable and important contribution to the general field of psychology, including identity research. The 'power' of language in shaping the individual's actions as well as their thinking has been considered and used in studies by many researchers (e.g. Mercer, 2000). The analysis of texts and discourses that allows revealing the negotiations and struggles people engage with as they try to make sense of the world and themselves is a valuable tool to be used in identity research. However, narratives have often been used only as descriptions of different types of identity talk (both in terms of content and style), without offering further conceptualizations of identity processes in the individual or collective level. Contrary to the social constructionism view, it could be argued that there is more to identities than just stories about persons, and that a psychological reality that consists of the subjective constellation of different identities as particular realizations of cultural texts exists beyond discursive practices (see also Shi-xu, 2006). As Falmagne (2004) argues: "There is a conceptual necessity for a 'site' that remains *ontologically* continuous through moments of relational meaning construction and through moments of discursive construction of the subject, a site that anchors these moments and contradictions" (p. 835, original emphasis).

Another issue to consider in relation to social constructionism is related to the role of individual actors as opposed to cultural-historical texts in the

individual-collective relationship. It seems that the relationship between the two is not balanced, but the supremacy of the social is emphasised at the expense of individual's agency (Dodds, Lawrence & Valsiner, 1997). Individual agents do not only use discourses, but have to comply with these or resist them with great difficulties as the texts have "exclusive constitutive power" (Falmagne, 2004, p. 838). As Holland and her colleagues (Holland et al., 2001) have pointed out: "Social constructivism conceives discourses and practices to be the tools that build the self in contexts of power, rather than as expressions of stable interpretations of world and values that have been imparted to the person through enculturation" (p. 27). Despite stressing the 'power' of socio-cultural texts, ideologies and social categories in creating and reproducing certain identities, social constructionism has not been hugely successful in providing systematic account of the emergence and stabilization of these social categories or ideologies (Nagel, 2000).

However, it has to be acknowledged that there are many different strands in the social constructionist approach. The one described here, stressing the existence of discursive reality and seeing identities as mere realizations of powerful collective texts, can be seen as a radical version of social constructionism. In recent decades other approaches have emerged that place greater emphasis on persons' authorship in creating their personal stories in ways that are enabled or suggested by their cultures. For example, Butler (1997) emphasises that individuals can also contest the dominant norms and ways the identities are structured and restricted by discourses and therefore execute their active agency. Similarly, while being interested in ways identities are constructed in narratives Sfard and Prusak (2005) take a more balanced view to the individual's functioning within the discursive world. This latter version of social constructionism is closer to socio-cultural view of identity that seeks to describe the person-culture intertwining in a balanced manner (see Chapter 4).

3.4 Conclusions

In this chapter two theoretical perspectives of identity were contrasted and discussed with the aim of pointing out their main postulates and underlying assumptions. Social identity theory, identity theory, acculturation and ethnic identity theories were considered to be based on essentialist and individualistic principles and therefore seen as mostly focusing on the entity-like nature of identity. In contrast, social constructionist view was seen as a perspective that denies the entity ontology and rather centres on the processual nature of identity.

It was acknowledged in the chapter that both of these theoretical perspectives include fruitful ideas that are worth considering and developing further when conceptualising identity. The role of the social other in personal sense-making, including texts as representations of social others, the awareness-exploration-resolution cycle and the idea of discourses as important resources for investigating personal sense-making were identified as such valuable ideas.

Nevertheless, due to the focus of these conceptual frames on either entity or on process, which becomes evident when the underlying assumptions of the perspectives are considered, these theoretical perspectives are seen as one-sided and therefore limited. Instead, a theoretical frame that enables to explain identity both in terms of process as well as in terms of entity, is assumed to be necessary for a fruitful conceptualization of identity. Socio-cultural perspective is considered to be such a framework in the current investigation. The underlying assumptions and relevant ideas within this theoretical approach are discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

THEORETICAL BASIS OF THE STUDY

The present chapter seeks to provide an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of the current research project. Socio-cultural tradition is used in this investigation as a starting point for offering a universal model of identity construction that takes into account both the entity-like and process-like nature of this psychological phenomenon.

Giving an overview of the conceptualization of identity within socio-cultural perspective is not a straightforward task. Despite the vast amount of theoretical and empirical work that deals with issues of identity, the field seems to lack a comprehensive account of this psychological phenomenon. Valsiner's (1998; 2007b) socio-genetic theory of personality that deals with a similar psychological phenomenon, is the most elaborate account of this sort, and will therefore be frequently referred to in the following theoretical discussion. Nevertheless, most of the theorizing within socio-cultural perspective about identity remains on a general level, without elaboration of how exactly the theoretical principles of socio-cultural approach can be utilized in building a model of identity construction (see for example Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). In the current chapter the main ideas of socio-cultural tradition that can be used to build

a comprehensive account of identity construction will be discussed. A model that is based on these general ideas will be presented in Chapter 7.

4.1 Socio-genetic nature of human psyche – a rediscovered old idea

The idea that all higher human psychological processes, such as thinking or memorizing are social in their nature is not new, but was shared by many seminal thinkers of the turn of the 19th century – both in Europe and in the United States. For example, James Mark Baldwin's theory of development that is built around the notion of persistent imitation which transforms individual's experiences in and of the external world into novel intra-personal constructions, echoes the socio-genetic worldview (Valsiner & Van der Veer, 2000; Valsiner, 2007a). The idea that the origin and nature of human mind is essentially social was clearly present also in the works of French psychiatrist Pierre Janet, a close friend of Baldwin. His theory of conduct is based on the ideas that all private mental acts, such as language or thought, are originally social; that all higher mental functions are the result of a long and complex development; and that higher mental processes are tied to the actions subject performs (van der Veer, 1994).

George Herbert Mead (1934), another influential figure from the turn of the century, explains the emergence of individual consciousness through social communication using the concept of social act, in which a vocal gesture (or a significant symbol) from an individual evokes an appropriate response from others that completes the social act by giving meaning to person's initial action (Farr, 1996). Hence, each social act includes divergent, yet complementary perspectives, such as giving-receiving or hiding-seeking, that people become aware and familiar with through their participation in and experiences of different activities, mass media, imagination and games (Gillespie, 2006). The divergent, but complementary perspectives are simultaneously evoked by a significant symbol, making it possible for the person to become aware, change and integrate these perspectives (Gillespie, 2005). By internalizing this divergent position, i.e. taking the perspective of the other, a person can become the observer of one's own actions, a self-reflective subject with a distinct sense of self (Dodds et al.,

1997; Gillespie, 2007a).

Last but not least, the complex theoretical framework of Lev Vygotsky that is built around the notion of semiotic mediation of higher psychological functions has been vastly influential in the recent re-discovery of the socio-cultural world view (Daniels, 2001). While Vygotsky's thinking is original in many ways, it also integrates many of the ideas of other influential thinkers of his period (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). Baldwin's ideas about persistent imitation that transforms the external social experiences and 'fossilizes' these in person-specific intra-psychological constructions has found its way into Vygotsky's notion of internalization as the basis of the social↔personal interaction. Baldwin's ideas about double nature of imitation, where the copy carries certain social suggestions, but also transcends these in a personally unique way, are utilized in Vygotsky's method of double stimulation, where the auxiliary means offered to the individual have a meaning potential that can be taken up in a personally relevant manner to solve the problem situation (Valsiner, 2007a). Similarly, Baldwin's ideas about art and play as contexts where individuals can transcend their current state of development, have found their way into Vygotsky's theorizing (Valsiner, 1994). Vygotsky has also used and made well-known Janet's fundamental assertion that higher psychological functions emerge through the social interaction and appear first at the interpersonal, external level and only then intra-psychologically (Valsiner & Van der Veer, 2000). Even if Mead and Vygotsky never met, the similarity between their ideas about significant symbol and sign is noteworthy, too (Gillespie, 2007a).

The ideas of these seminal thinkers, as well as the thoughts of William James, John Dewey, Josiah Royce and Charles Sanders Pierce have formed the basis of the contemporary socio-cultural perspective that has emerged since the 1980s and 1990s. References to the ideas of those thinkers will be made throughout the current thesis, together with indications to more recent developments in this theoretical tradition.

4.2 Underlying assumptions of the socio-cultural approach

The socio-cultural perspective is based on the idea that the person and surrounding environment are inseparable and mutually transformative (Sawyer, 2002). Instead of treating collective and individual as separate elements that somehow influence each other (Costall, 2007), socio-cultural approach seeks to conceptualize the two as a single dialogically interrelated system (Marková, 2003b), where the individual can be understood as “a higher form of sociality” (Vygotsky, 1989, p. 59). The person and his/her surrounding environment are seen as intertwined open-ended systems, which depend for their existence upon mutual exchanges (Valsiner & Diriwächter, 2008). While being dynamic wholes in themselves, they also can be seen as parts of a larger whole. Some authors within the socio-cultural perspective propose treating the two in a completely inseparable manner (e.g. Rogoff, 1990), while others prefer an analytic or inclusive separability that enables to “distinguish the organism (person) from its environment (social world) while remaining their dynamic interdependence” (Valsiner, 1998, p. 352). The latter approach assumes that for research purposes person and environment can be investigated separately as far as their interrelatedness is kept in mind. This inclusive separation is utilized also in the current research project. The main focus is on the individual’s functioning, that is nevertheless explored within and in relation to the surrounding environment. Most of the authors, whose ideas will be discussed in the following sections, tend to treat person and context in this inclusively separated manner. This is especially true with the authors who conceptualize the intertwining of the person and environment through issues of otherness and dialogicality.

In addition to assuming person-environment inseparability, the socio-cultural approach takes a process ontological approach to psychological phenomena (Sawyer, 2002). It acknowledges the “need to concentrate not on the product of development, but on the very process by which higher forms [of psychological functioning] are established” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 64). Hence, socio-culturally oriented research efforts focus on understanding psychological phenomena in their functioning. They look at these as processes at the boundary

between person and context, which link the two together. Hence, psychological phenomena are not seen as entities that are created as a result of external↔internal movements and characterise solely individual. Similarly to the inseparability claim, the process ontology is utilized in variety of ways by different authors. References to these variations will be made in the text, especially when the topic of internalization/externalization is discussed.

4.3 Person within the socio-cultural context

The wish to emphasise the inseparability of the social and personal as opposed to the individualistic separation of person from its environment, has led to the increased interest in conceptualizing the collective component of the person-environment relationship. While the ethnographically oriented accounts focus on describing the social contexts in their entirety and complexity (e.g. Rogoff, 2003), many socio-culturally oriented models seem to concentrate on explaining some aspect of the culture. For example, Moscovici (1998; 2007) focuses on what he calls ‘social representations’, i.e. systems of values, ideas and practices, as elaborations of social objects for the purpose of behaving and communicating (Moscovici & Marková, 1998; Wagner, 1998). Cole (1996) sees culture as consisting of different cultural artefacts, that are simultaneously ideal and material and “coordinate human being with the world and one another in a way that combines the properties of tools and symbols” (p. 144). Wertsch (2002) talks about collective voices, that represent different actors, including institutional actors in the society, and which become integrated into the intra-psychological system of individuals. While these accounts claim to treat person and environment in their complete inseparability, the individual is often left out of the focus of the explanation; more precisely, the individual is considered merely through explaining which aspects of collective sphere enable the emergence of individual psyche.

4.3.1 Person in multiple ‘figured worlds’

While belonging to this tradition of complete person-environment inseparability, that focuses on specific collective semiospheres (Lotman, 1999) as spaces of

personal meaning construction, Holland and her colleagues' notion of 'figured world' seems to offer a more holistic approach to describing the social contexts within which individuals function (Holland et al., 2001).

By "figured world", then, we mean a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others. [...] These collective "as-if" worlds are sociohistoric, contrived interpretations or imaginations that mediate behavior and so, from the perspective of heuristic development, inform participants' outlooks. The ability to sense (see, hear, touch, taste, feel) the figured world becomes embodied over time, through continual participation (Holland et al., 2001, p. 52-53).

Figured worlds produce and can be characterised by shared activities, discourses and artefacts that people engage with. By following a certain scenario or rules of thinking, feeling and acting people who participate in a figured world, reproduce those scripts, keeping the figured world alive, at the same time also developing it. Holland uses the notion of 'improvisation' to account for moments when the personal and collective interpretations of appropriate behaviour within the figured world collide and a person has to come up with new ways of acting, feeling and thinking. Improvisations change the self-definition of the person, but they also leave a trace in the collective activity context.

Different subject positions, defined by social relations, content and boundaries of the figured world, are available for individuals to take up, reconstruct or resist through participation. Holland seems to conceive the personal meaning creation and participation in a shared figured world as a process of negotiation. For personal meanings are not constructed independently from others' suggestions, but individuals' idiosyncratic ways of engaging with the world need to be intelligible and justifiable to others. Thus, the figured world is defined also by the way others act in it and becoming a participant in a figured world means actively internalizing some of those action patterns. Figured worlds are constraining, but they are also enabling and empowering. Holland emphasises that the negotiations of personal meanings allow people to become what they want

to be and can be in a figured world, instead of merely being shaped by historically developed socio-cultural activity settings.

Holland and her colleagues' (Holland et al., 2001; Holland & Lave, 2001) conceptualization emphasises that during their life course, people are simultaneously engaged with many different collective meaning spaces that guide their behaviour and self-definition (e.g. simultaneous engagement with the figured world of Anonymous Alcoholics and that of a single parent). They direct our attention to the fact that often these figured worlds with their specific constraints and allowances may be contradictory and require a constant identity negotiation from the acting individual. Understanding these personal sense-making struggles requires segmenting person's life experience into meaningful units and understanding the respective socio-historic activity settings in their entirety and complexity.

4.3.2 Individual meaning space as personal culture

While Holland's account seems to be dominated by the interest in the functioning of the collective sphere, Valsiner (1998) offers an account that seeks to explain the content of both the social and the personal. This is achieved by separating the person and context analytically, while assuming their interrelatedness. Describing the dynamic interrelatedness of individual and collective worlds Valsiner uses the notions of 'personal and collective cultures':

The collective culture entails communally shared meanings, social norms, and everyday life practices, all united in a heterogeneous complex. On the basis of this complex, individual persons construct their personally idiosyncratic semiotic systems of symbols, practices, and personal objects, all of which constitute the personal culture. The relation between the collective and personal cultures is conceptualized as persons' active and constructive internalization-externalization process (Valsiner, 1998, p. 30).

Personal culture is defined as everything that has a meaning to a person, everything that one considers to be related to or belonging to. Personal culture can be considered to have a mental as well as a physical aspect. The latter

is understood as the physical extension of the person into the surrounding environment through tangible objects that carry certain subjective meanings. Referring to the idea that the boundary between the person and the surrounding world does not run along the body contours of the person, William James used the concept of ‘material self’ (Fuhrer, 2004). Similarly, Heidmets’ (1989) notion of ‘personalization of the environment’ refers to the expansion of the self into the surrounding environment, by way of attributing certain subjective meanings to objects and therefore creating a link between the object and the individual. Hence, a bank-account or a personally significant novel is a material object out in the collective world, but through the meaning attached to it, it becomes part of the self.

In addition to this partially material, partially semiotic spatial extension of the self, the purely mental aspect of personal culture consists of all the ideas that the individual holds, the emotions, motives, interests and opinions one has and the plans for actions one creates. This is the imaginary space between internalization and externalization, that Zittoun (2004) calls ‘interiority’. This semiotic sphere consists of subjective signs that person has created in order to capture in abstract and generalized form the ever-changing experience, and to create a bridge from the past into present and forward to the future (Valsiner, 2001). It is assumed that through the sign-making the person creates a feeling of continuity and stability, a sense of self and identity. These concepts, that in the individualistic psychology are treated as separate entities are considered to be the same process, the same psychological function in the current theoretical approach and therefore used interchangeably (Fuhrer, 2004). They are all similarly conceptualized “as a process of constant construction and reconstruction of the subjective totality of reflections upon the world” (Valsiner, 1998, p. 399). In other words, personal culture can be understood as a collection of personally significant objects and subjective signs, including self-understandings that provide the feeling of self and identity, that the person utilizes to regulate one’s relationship with the world and to organize and master one’s own behaviour (Vygotsky, 1978; Holland & Lachicotte, 2007).

4.3.3 Shared socio-cultural context as collective culture

Collective culture is in Valsiner's account defined as consisting of objects that have a certain meaning to all people in that collective culture.

Collective culture is the living field of the suggested meanings, feelings and actions with which the person interacts over the life course. It also is the living site of the development of social structures (e.g., families, schools, political organizations), groups of people (e.g., birth cohorts, social classes) and ideological institutions (e.g., religion, law) (Lawrence & Valsiner, 2003, p. 726).

One of the most important and widely-investigated aspects of collective culture is language. Collective culture also includes social representations (Raudsepp, 2005). It also contains Wertsch' (2002) textual resources that echo the multiple voices of individual and institutional social others from the past, present and future. Collective culture is composed of cultural artefacts as described by Cole (1996) and Wartofsky (1979), too. For the former "an artefact is an aspect of the material world that has been modified over the history of its incorporation into goal-directed human action" (Cole, 1996, p. 117). It is simultaneously material and conceptual. Similarly, Wartofsky understands artefacts as "objectifications of human needs and intentions already invested with cognitive and affective content" (Wartofsky, 1979, p. 204). His three-level classification is useful in pointing out the variety of cultural artefacts available for people to engage with. Primary artefacts consist of material objects that can be used in a specific (practical) context for specific purposes (e.g. axe or blackboard). Secondary artefacts include the "recipes" for using these material objects (e.g. norms, rules, traditions). Tertiary artefacts consist of 'imagined worlds' that are not closely related to the practical activity, but allow people to go beyond their immediate life context (e.g. art works).

Hence, historically developed collective culture in its variety of forms is a set of social suggestions or cultural messages that individuals as active agents exploit to create their own personal meaning spaces (i.e. personal cultures). Cole's (1996) garden metaphor is useful in understanding the role of culture as

understood in socio-cultural perspective. According to Cole, to cultivate, means to take care of something, to look after its growth, development and improvement. Culture should therefore be understood not as a static system of symbols, but as an open and ever-changing system of facilitating and auxiliary devices to be actively engaged with. The artefacts as social suggestions in the culture are available for persons to go beyond their current capabilities. They are accessible for individuals to be used as tools to do something else, to rise to another level, to improve and to develop. Zittoun's (2007b) account of cultural elements being used as symbolic resources fits perfectly with the garden metaphor of culture. Her cultural elements are "complex symbolic constellations, such as objects or rites within family, religious or national traditions, which are shared diachronically, or such as books, novels or paintings, which are made out of organizations of semiotic units within discrete objects, synchronically available in a given society" (Zittoun, 2004, p. 132). This specific group of cultural artefacts (tertiary artefacts in Wartofsky's terminology) can be used by individuals as symbolic resources to support the work of transition in which persons are trying to restructure their personal culture and restore sense of continuity and stability beyond an unexpected event or a rupture. However, by engaging with the shared meaning space in their idiosyncratic ways and by externalizing their engagements, people contribute, alter or rise to another level also that shared knowledge space. Therefore, even if the personal and collective cultures are described separately in Valsiner's account, their separability is analytical and inclusive. The two are inevitably intertwined.

Valsiner's account enables us to bring together different concepts that seek to describe the socio-cultural environment, as well as providing an account of the personal aspect of this interactive system. Differently from Holland and her colleagues' conceptualization, Valsiner seeks to describe the contents of the collective semiosphere that surrounds the person in general terms, not describing the specific zones as 'figured worlds' inside this general meaning field. From this perspective the two accounts are complementary. However, Valsiner's account of personal culture is an important addition to Holland's otherwise culture-centred approach. For this reason, his conceptualization of personal and collective culture

has been used as an important underlying idea in the current research project.

4.4 Dynamic intertwining of the person and the socio-cultural context

Person and environment as open-ended dynamic systems are separated from each other by a boundary. The structures of these open-ended systems are fluid and open to be transformed through mutual exchanges (Diriwächter & Valsiner, 2005). The processes at the boundary intertwine the two systems by bringing the material from the external plane (i.e. from one system) to the internal plane (i.e. into another system) and then to the external field again. The person and environment as parts of a larger whole become therefore simultaneously connected and separated, as their interrelatedness is continuously renewed in a never-ending cycle.

4.4.1 Semiotic mediation as the basis of person-context intertwining

The general socio-cultural perspective with its variety of applications is based on the idea that person and culture become intertwined through semiotic mediation.

Human beings are active subjects who relate to their surrounding world by way of constant construction of semiotically mediated intrapsychological [...] and extrapsychological [...] psychological devices (Valsiner, 1998, p. 115).

When talking about semiotic mediation it is often referred to Vygotsky's (1978) conviction that all human development is mediated by cultural tools that are in their essence semiotic. Socialization and enculturation can be understood as the process of introducing a child into the shared knowledge and experience pool of the cultural community, and the child gradually starting to use these suggested cultural tools as resources for her functioning in the socio-cultural context. According to Penuel and Wertsch (1995): "Mediational means, or cultural tools, are resources for individuals that shape, empower, constrain, and have the potential to transform action" (p. 86). Introduction of a new concept or a new instrument to the problem situation helps the person to solve the problem, to reconfigure it, to manage it. The improvement is not quantitative as in speed or efficiency. Rather it is a qualitative shift; the entire situation becomes restructured

on the semiotic level to allow more adaptive functioning (e.g. a little boy is using a timetable and a watch to turn a lonely, scary and uncertain train journey into an interesting and purposeful activity of checking arrival and departure times; (see Zittoun, 2007a). Hence, cultural tools are not only ways of purposefully acting on the environment, but they are also means for transforming these purposes in important ways and therefore mediating individual's psychological functioning (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995).

Wertsch (2007) distinguishes between two types of mediation. In the case of explicit mediation the 'stimulus mean' is introduced to the problem situation intentionally and purposefully by the person or by the social other and the tool itself is obvious and nontransitory. In contrast, implicit mediation does not involve the purposeful and intentional introduction of signs into the situation, but rather these signs, being related to social or inner speech, are "part of a preexisting, independent stream of communicative action that becomes integrated with other forms of goal-directed behaviour" (Wertsch, 2007, p. 181). The two forms are not separated, but instead intertwined, with the explicit mediation being accompanied by the implicit mediation. Therefore mediation and the messages it carries with it are not always clear and visible neither to the observer nor to the acting individual. The subjective signs, once created, regulate the behaviour without the individual being necessarily aware of them. At the same time, the usage of explicit mediation can make implicit mediational processes visible⁶.

4.4.2 Processes underlying person-context intertwining

While the idea of semiotic mediation of individual psychological functioning is shared by all socio-culturally oriented authors, the boundary-processes by way of which external semiotic material becomes internal and thereafter external again in a never-ending cycle, are conceptualized somewhat differently. All these conceptualizations stress the active agency of the individual in this transformative

⁶ Vygotsky's double-stimulation method uses this idea. See Chapter 6 about methodology for further explanation.

process, but differ in the emphasis that is placed on the inseparability of the person and environment (Valsiner, 1998). Rogoff (1990; 2003) uses the term ‘participatory appropriation’ to explain the personal change that emerges through person’s active participation in social practice. She emphasizes the social interaction as an important basis for the development of new skills and ideas at the individual level, as the person moves from being an apprentice in social practice to the position of an expert (Wenger, 1998). Similarly, Cole (1996) and Wertsch (2002), emphasising the person-environment inseparability, have preferred to use the term ‘appropriation’ to refer to the process by way of which cultural messages are brought over to the intra-personal space, i.e. made one’s own. However, it has been suggested that while focusing on the social interaction and participation in shared socio-cultural practice that guide and enable the construction of new ideas and the restructuring of personal meaning space, the accounts of appropriation do not offer an explanation of how this construction at the individual level takes place (Dodds et al., 1997; Fuhrer, 2004). Alternatively, the concept of internalization together with its counterpart externalization that connect the analytically separated person and environment, has been proposed to explain the individual level processes by way of which external↔internal movements take place (Valsiner, 1998). While being criticised for its individual-centeredness (Matusov, 1998; Wertsch, 2002), the internalization/externalization concepts seem to offer an explanation how the person is shaped by the socio-cultural context while simultaneously shaping it. As these concepts place greater emphasis on the concrete mechanisms of the external↔internal movements at the individual level, they have informed the current study that seeks to understand the individual’s sense-making within and in relation to the socio-cultural world.

4.4.2.1 Active internalization

Valsiner (1998) defines the reciprocal processes of internalization/externalization as follows:

Internalization is the process by which meanings that relate to phenomena, and that are suggested to the individual by ‘social others’ who pursue their personal goals while assuming social roles, are brought over into individual’s

intrapsychological system. This 'bringing-over' process involves constructive modification of the 'brought-over' material by the person. The reciprocal process of externalization connotes activities by which the once-social – but now personal – set of meanings is constructively moved into novel contexts within the social environment (Valsiner, 1998, p. 115).

According to this line of reasoning, the individual is constrained by the collective culture, i.e. socio-cultural context influences the development of individual's psychological functions. This was the underlying idea of Vygotsky and Luria's experiments in the Central-Asia in 1930s (Tulviste, 1984). More recently, the idea of constraining culture has been investigated through the lenses of power and control. For example, Wertsch (2002) talks about authoritative texts (e.g. religion or political ideology) that are not meant to be questioned or dialogically engaged with, but rather accepted as given resources by individuals. Daniels (1989; 1995) points to the power relations and division of labour within practices that influence the ways people can construct their personal meanings, and shows how different school settings can affect the development of children's psychological functioning and behaviour patterns (Daniels, Holst, Lunt & Ulsøe-Johansen, 1996). Similarly, Engeström's (2000; 2001) emphasis on rules, community and division of labour in activity systems is guided by the need of making the influence of socio-cultural context "visible" and offering tools to conceptualize its complexity, too.

However, culture is simultaneously constraining and enabling. It constrains individual's development to a set of possible pathways, but not to a single one (Fuhrer, 2004). Collective meanings are offered as starting points for individuals to engage with the culture dialogically. The person-environment relationship is understood as a "independent dependence" (Valsiner, 1998). Thus, a person is an active agent in the internalization that is essentially a transformative process (Lawrence & Valsiner, 1993). Bringing the external semiotic material over to the internal plane requires innovation and novelty; it requires co-ordination of the new with the old that brings along the restructuring of both. Hence, it is often accompanied with tension and resistance. Internalization is

therefore best understood as co-construction (Stetsenko & Arieviditch, 2004). The individuals do not simply ‘take over’ or ‘take in’ the suggestions offered to them by the social other. The social suggestions are not ready-made and fixed, but rather they are meaning potentials that become actualized in a specific way in person’s engagement with the world. Vygotsky has differentiated between the relatively stable and unified ‘collective meaning’ and dynamic and fluid ‘personal sense’ that changes with the context (Vygotsky, 1987). Similarly, Bakhtin (1986) has brilliantly illustrated the dynamics between social and personal by pointing out that the word (or utterance) is always half alien, carrying the meanings, intentions and expressions of the others, that are unified with one’s ‘own-ness’. Falmagne’s (2004) differentiation between active and non-deliberate agency adds another layer to this discussion: while the active agency constitutes person’s active and purposeful internalization, rejection and negotiation efforts, the non-deliberate agency refers to the affective and motivational “baggage” that influences the personal sense-making, often without individual’s awareness. Thus, personal sense of the individual is “a concrete realization of a cultural possibility that transcends their singularity” (Roth, 2007, p. 89). Personal sense is not an exact reflection of collective meaning space, but the person always “constructs an understanding of the world that goes beyond the collective culture in idiosyncratic ways” (Valsiner, 1998 p. 32).

4.4.2.2 Creative externalization

Internalization goes hand in hand with externalization. Being brought over and integrated into the internal meaning space, cultural messages are also reflected back to the collective culture, creating novelty and change also in the social sphere. Internalization and externalization are interrelated processes that cannot exist without one another. Both, the personal and the collective become altered in continuous internalization-externalization cycles through which new semiotic and material realities are created (Zittoun, Duveen, Gillespie, Ivinson & Psaltis, 2003). The graffiti artists’ creative self-expressions, that Fuhrer (2004) describes, are visible traces of an individuals’ sense-making, that other’s can engage with on the level of meaning. Similarly, the ideas expressed by a young scientist that are taken

up and used by his colleagues create new collective meaning spaces. Hence, the collective sphere changes the person, and becomes changed as a result of individual's actions. The object, that person engages with, changes, while also working back on the individual (Stetsenko, 2005). As Edwards (2005) claims: "In this transactional relationship between subject and object we transform the object through, for example, contesting its meaning and understanding it better and we also transform ourselves" (p. 174). Hence, collective history becomes part of individuals', while individuals simultaneously make history in both their personal as well as in collective sense (Holland & Lave, 2001).

Georg Simmel's ideas about the intrinsic self-fulfilling nature of human beings who become cultivated, i.e. raise to a higher level of development through the use of cultural objects (Levine, 1971), has recently been taken up in socio-cultural literature. Fuhrer's account of cultivation, that is inspired by Simmel, explains how human agents' intertwining with socio-cultural contexts through semiotic mediation provides the basis for their personal growth and development (Fuhrer, 2004). In his words, people cultivate the artefacts to cultivate themselves and by doing so they contribute to their own development as well as to the development of their cultural environment (Fuhrer & Josephs, 1998). Persons as active agents do not only use the affordances (Gibson, 1986) offered to them by collective culture, but they actively create possibilities for themselves. Humans can choose which social suggestions to internalize and which ones to reject, as well as being able to choose and create their own socio-cultural context in order to find a more rewarding or allowing situation. People are actively negotiating their developmental situations, i.e. they participate purposefully in the creation of socio-cultural contexts that allow them to develop and become what they want to become. By acting upon the collective culture people are influencing or constraining the shared semiospheres and that can again be accompanied with tension and resistance. Thus, the person and context relations are mutually and bi-directionally constraining (Lawrence & Valsiner, 2003).

4.4.3 Social interaction in semiotic mediation

In the current theoretical framework semiotic mediation, that is the basis of internalization and externalization processes, is understood as social in nature. However, this does not necessarily mean that semiotic mediation is restricted to the social interaction between individuals. Instead, it is assumed that the social other is always present in the cultural tool (Bertau, 2007). In making personal sense, the subject is in dialogue with the cultural tool in order to grasp the collective meaning potential that is embedded in it. The concept implicit social interaction could be used to refer to this omnipresent dialogue, as opposed to the explicit interaction which refers to the actual communication act between two or more individuals. While explicit interaction is *about* collective meanings, the implicit interaction takes place *with* the shared meaning. Often explicit interaction helps to grasp the collective meaning potential (as in teaching/learning situations), or to turn a cultural element into a personal symbolic resource (as in getting recognition from the other to one's usage of a symbolic resource; (Zittoun et al., 2003). However, the engagement with the cultural tools is social also when social others are not physically present. It seems that this is what Vygotsky, borrowing Janet's idea (Valsiner & Van der Veer, 2000), meant when he proposed that every psychological function is created first interpersonally, i.e. by the person in dialogue with the social other, and only thereafter intra-personally, i.e. integrated into intra-psychological system (Vygotsky, 1978). To consider semiotic mediation as referring only to the explicit interaction is therefore to look only to the surface of that idea, while ignoring its deeper meaning.

Thus, to make this idea more evident, the basic Vygotskian triangle of semiotic mediation that depicts the subject working on the object using cultural tools (see Vygotsky, 1978, p. 47) could be expanded to include also the social other. Zittoun's (2007b) semiotic prism, that stresses the presence of the social other in creation and usage of symbolic resources, seems to be useful in this respect (see Figure 4.4.3). In her account, the other has to be present to give an initial semiotic input for the personal sense-making (i.e. explain the shared collective meaning or a personal sense for the other), and to acknowledge one's

usage of the symbolic tool. But importantly the other is present also within the cultural element, that is “full of the echoes of other voices and discourses” (Zittoun, 2007c, p. 366). Hence, Zittoun’s prism seems to capture both the implicit and explicit interaction. Similar ideas of the role of social other in person-culture interaction are also expressed by Josephs and Fuhrer’s quadrangular model (see Fuhrer & Josephs, 1998, p. 290; or Fuhrer, 2004, p. 93).

These ideas of implicit interaction and the presence of the other in every social suggestion have been essential in framing the theoretical basis of the current study. These ideas will be further elaborated in the following discussion and again taken up in the formulation of the conceptual model of identity construction.

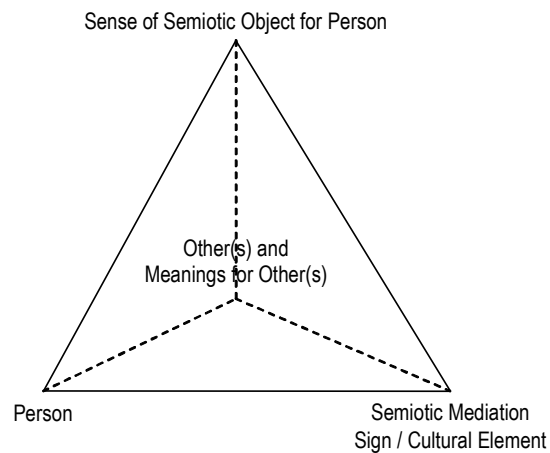


Figure 4.4.3 Semiotic prism (from Zittoun, 2007b, p. 353)

4.4.4 From cultural artefacts and collective meaning potentials to tools, symbolic resources and subjective signs

As the previous discussion has shown, the connection between person and environment is semiotic in nature. It is possible at the level of meaning. Internalization constitutes the ‘bringing-over’ of available social suggestions or collective meaning potentials embedded in cultural artefacts in a personally

meaningful manner and integrating them into intra-psychological system (Valsiner, 2001). Collective culture can be conceived as consisting of cultural artefacts (Cole, 1996) or cultural elements (Zittoun, 2007b), such as a novel, a computer or a ruler that are material objects, but that importantly carry with them also collective meaning potentials. In addition to these material and semiotic cultural elements, collective culture includes also artefacts that are non-material and exist only in collective consciousness (e.g. social representations). Irrespective of the form of the cultural artefact, the semiotic aspect, the meaning potential embedded in them enables individuals to engage with the socio-cultural context. Similarly, externalization is semiotically mediated. The others can engage with the expression of our personal sense-making through grasping in their idiosyncratic manner its meaning.

As a result of this semiotically mediated engagement with the collective culture, personal culture becomes created, i.e. certain objects are turned into personally significant tools and subjective signs are constructed and integrated into the individual's intra-psychological world (Valsiner, 1998). According to Vygotsky's reasoning, people's engagement with the world results in the usage of tools, that are means of mastering the nature and the objects in it, being therefore externally oriented; and the creation of subjective signs, that are means for mastering oneself and therefore internally oriented (Vygotsky, 1978). Obviously, mastering of the nature and the mastering of oneself are intertwined. Learning to use a tool creates new personal meaning spaces and therefore changes the intra-psychological system. However, for the reasons of clarity, the distinction between signs and tools needs to be made.

Some cultural artefacts which the person starts to use as tools are utilized in a culture-specific, but not vastly personal manner (e.g. a computer as a tool). However, cultural artefacts can also be used in a highly idiosyncratic manner which goes beyond the immediate cultural value or meaning of the object in idiosyncratic ways (i.e. tertiary artefacts in Wartofsky's terms). According to Zittoun (2004) people mobilize some cultural elements, such as songs or novels as symbolic resources in order to deal with difficult life situations. In her account, a

symbolic resource is what “an utterance is to language [...] or what used ‘instrument’ is to a potential ‘tool’” (Zittoun, 2007b, p. 344). Using a symbolic resource is a highly individual way of relating to the outer world through investing personal sense into external object. In Zittoun’s own words:

The notion of symbolic resource is located exactly there, where the person turns a socially shared element into a psychologically relevant resource; uses of symbolic resources necessarily constitute a bridging between inner world and shared reality (2007b, p. 345).

Similarly to any tool usage, the usage of symbolic resources creates personal meanings: they help to develop new knowledge and skills and allow the construction of new self-definitions (Zittoun, 2004). Therefore, the usage of symbolic resources feeds into restructuring of one’s intra-psychological sign system. That is, it feeds into creating new subjective signs that function in abstract and generalized form as invisible traces of the previous engagement with the world that enable the person to relate to the context and regulate one’s behaviour in the unpredictable immediate future.

Similarly to the fact that cultural artefacts can be used in a more or less idiosyncratic and symbolic manner, the subjective signs can also differ in their personal significance. Kozulin (1998) uses the terms psychological tools to refer to those personal meaning spaces that enable persons to function effectively in their socio-cultural context, but are not related to person’s self-understanding or self-definition (e.g. personal understanding of democracy or of the mathematical concept π). However, in their engagement with the surrounding context people also create subjective signs that allow them to define themselves and make sense of their being in and in relation to the surrounding environment. These are subjective signs that provide the person with a sense of continuity and sameness from the past through the present into the future. These subjective signs can be used to manage one’s behaviour and control one’s emotions, to define one’s being and therefore regulate one’s functioning in the surrounding environment. This specific group of subjective signs is in the focus of the current study.

4.5 Construction of subjective signs

4.5.1 Laminar model of subjective sign construction

While internalization/externalization, which function based on semiotic mediation explain the external↔internal movements in general terms, there are few accounts that explain in detail how the social message is brought over and integrated into the intra-psychological plane. Valsiner's laminar model (Lawrence & Valsiner, 2003; Valsiner, 2007b) seeks to fulfil this gap in theorizing. His model that focuses mostly on internalization is built around the idea that 'bringing-over' processes are bound up with both resistance and acceptance. Not all the social suggestions that are encountered in people's flow of experiences are integrated into their intra-psychological system and start to function as subjective signs that have power to evoke emotions and guide the behaviour. Instead, some messages become instinct or fade away during their journey from external to internal plane.

According to Valsiner, people's intra-psychological system can be understood as consisting of three layers that proceed gradually from the peripheral zones to the innermost core (see Figure 4.5.1). Each layer is separated from the next one by a barrier that functions as a buffer and needs to be traversed by an incoming social message. This barrier can be conceived as a hierarchically organized complex of signs, where more abstract and general metasigns regulate the functioning of less generalized signs (Abbey, 2007a). In order for the message to move from the outer layers to the innermost layer, it has to be transformed through inner dialogue between the new message and pre-existing signs. As regulators of inward movement of new messages, the existing signs can enter into dialogue or block the movement of an incoming message at the boundary between layers (Abbey, 2007a). The dialogue between different voices can be resolved by rejection of the message (metasign blocks the entrance to the next layer), in which case it fades away, or by transformation of the message, which builds a congruence between different voices and allows the message to move on to the next layer, until it becomes integrated into the existing emotional and knowledge structures (i.e. a new subjective sign becomes created). In the inner-most layer of the self-system the message becomes part of the critical dialogue person has with

oneself, i.e. a sign functions as an internal voice that is used to “assess” the new incoming social messages. Also, once in this core of person’s interiority the sign is ready to be transferred into the outer world by externalization (Lawrence & Valsiner, 2003). Thus, the already existing signs regulate the construction of new signs. This semiotic auto-regulation explains simultaneously the continuity and novelty of the self-system.

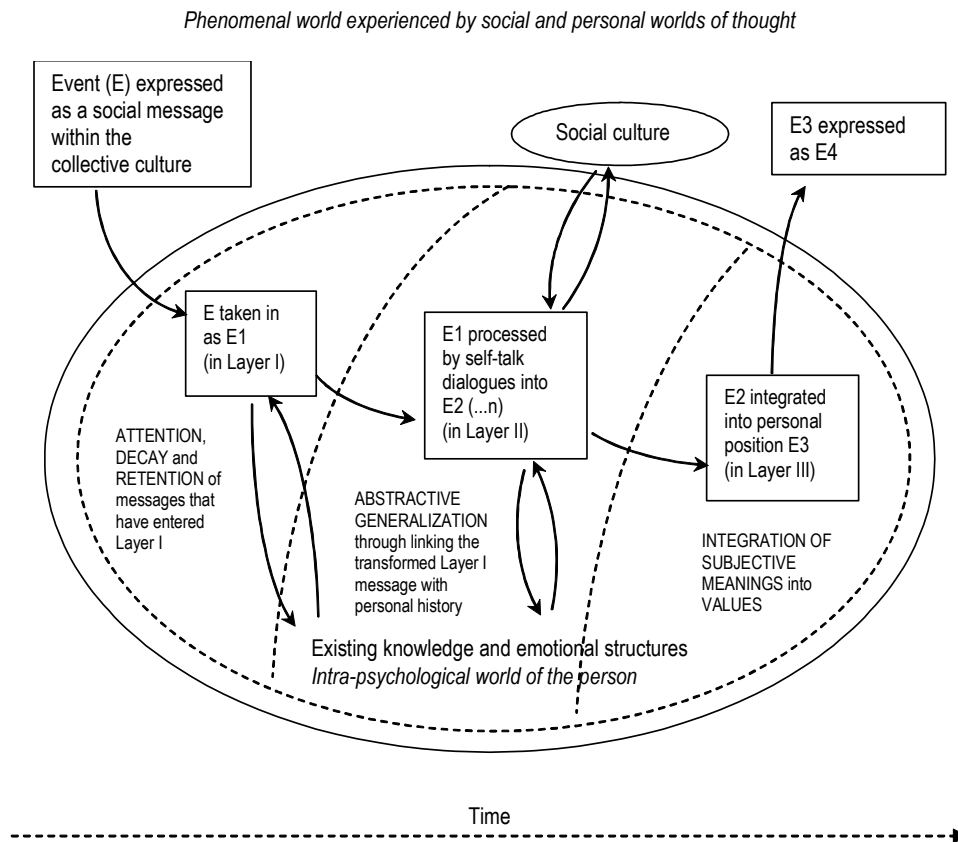


Figure 4.5.1 Laminar model of subjective sign construction (from Lawrence & Valsiner, 2003, p. 731, modified based on Valsiner 2007b, p. 346).

The process by way of which the social message moves from periphery to core can be understood as transformation of the concrete response to a given situation into a generalized and abstract subjective sign (Valsiner, 2001). This transformation is brought about by inner dialogue between different voices at

every layer, making the message gradually more and more abstract until it reaches the core in the form of highly generalized metasign. Different voices that are captured in generalized sign can constitute the perspective of another person or institution, but they can also be the ‘as-if’ perspective of the person, i.e. a voice from an anticipated future situation. According to Abbey (2007b) the presence of different perspectives creates a tension, an ambivalence that needs to be resolved in the sign construction. She uses the notion ‘meaning-as-motion’ to highlight “an ever-present ambiguity in meaning, on account of the blending of one literal sense into the next through notions of what could be” (Abbey, 2007b, p. 367). By combining different voices the sign takes a generalized form in which it can be distanced from a particular here-and-now situation and used in personal sense-making under new circumstances (i.e. projective contextualization) (Abbey & Valsiner, 2004). According to Valsiner: “Generalizability is the propensity of a sign to create an abstracted reflection upon that initial context” (Valsiner, 2001, p. 90). Four levels of distancing in sign construction can be distinguished: 1) embodied undifferentiated feeling and experience (fuzzy feeling that cannot be named); 2) labelling a situation (being able to name and articulate one’s thoughts and feelings, e.g., “I miss my family”); 3) creating categories to understand the self and the world (e.g. “I am a person for who close relationships are important”); and 4) creation of orienting values that may not be easy to articulate (i.e. hypergeneralization) but are guiding one’s everyday functioning (e.g. “**it is important to experience the world**/it is important to stay close to one’s family” (Valsiner, 2007c). A new sign can therefore be integrated into the existing semiotic architecture (Abbey, 2007a) of the self-system, but it can also alter it by creating a higher-level metasign that regulates the functioning of less general signs.

Importantly, the auto-dialogue between already existing internal perspectives and new incoming social suggestion that leads to the construction of generalized sign may not be fast and straightforward, but is a rather lengthy and fitful process. The person, being in the constant flow of life experiences can be distracted from one dialogue in order to enter into another, more urgent one. Thus, inner dialogues become interrupted, fade to the background, linger there and are

later brought back to the active state by another triggering event until they are finally resolved by rejection of the message or by incorporating it in a transformed mode into the intra-psychological system. The ambivalence and uncertainty, i.e. the perceived difference between perspectives, may be a lasting state. Each layer of person's intra-psychological system is therefore described by multiplicity of inner dialogues, some active and some in temporary passive state (Abbey, 2004). Abbey (2007a) describes this movement of the message through peripheral layers into the subjective core brilliantly:

The other is constantly in the process of flowing into us and ebbing out, and reaching different tide lines in every cycle. At some moments, you are there, entering into the realm of my awareness [...], and moments later, you may be gone, as my attention is called elsewhere. You come in, though not too far, and you recede. You may also linger in my awareness, even as I attend to other things. You are there, maybe even annoyingly so, and at some moment, concrete meanings may come [...]. You may then recede. Or you may extend into generality [...]. And at this point, you may go, again moving onto something else. You come in, reaching higher, and you recede. [...] But if you do not go [...] you can come into my subjective core. [...] You become a being, integrated with me, and any meanings that otherwise form dimensions of difference between us, are, at least temporally, neutralized. [...] You come in, reaching as high as you can, and after moments of lifetimes, you recede (Abbey, 2007a, p. 73-74).

Sign construction is oriented towards the future. According to Valsiner (2007c): "All semiotic processes that the person brings into one's life are oriented toward regulating and directing that flow into some selected future direction" (p. 351). Signs prepare individuals for the immediate future based on their previous experiences, by capturing in an abstract and generalized form the ever-changing experience. They go beyond creating a fit with the present state, and instead build a basis for facing new, unpredictable, but anticipated experiences in the future (as in Bergson's (1907/2005) creative adaptation). The signs that are created in the past are used and altered in the present to respond to the new experience and therefore create a bridge from the past through the present into the future. They

are created ahead of time, setting up a range of possible personal meaning potentials for the anticipated future; in this respect they have a feed-forward function (Valsiner, 2005). Personal sense-making is therefore a continuing process in which relative stability is created from permanent impermanence (Valsiner, 2001). Valsiner's parallel with maintaining the upright body posture in which the enduring balance is achieved through continuous correction of instantaneous imbalanced moments, is useful in understanding this process. In his words: "The particular signs may come and go, but the meaningfulness constructed by them (which in itself is a kind of metasign) stays in a steady state" (Valsiner, 2001, p. 89). This feeling of continuity and meaningfulness which is the result of subjective sign construction and semiotic auto-regulation within the intra-psychological system is understood as a sense of identity in the current investigation.

4.5.2 Personal life-goal orientations as highly generalized metasigns

Human life is not random and disconnected sequence of everyday sense-making efforts, but tied together by certain life-goal orientations that individuals pursue throughout their life-course in their unique way (Bühler & Massarik, 1968). Hence, the construction and usage of personal life-goals is an important factor in creating a sense of sameness, continuity and meaningfulness.

In the most general sense life-goal can be understood as person's desire to live a meaningful and self-fulfilling life. According to Bühler's theory, life-goals can be seen as vague and abstract values (e.g. "I want to live a stimulating life" or "I need to be in control of my life"), but they can also be relatively specific ideas about the direction of one's life (e.g. "I want to become a doctor", "I want to have three children" or "I want to get a Ph.D. before the age of 35"). Life-goals can be more or less immediate (e.g. "I want to start to study art") or very long-term (e.g. "One day I want to return to my motherland"). As such, life-goals exist as socio-culturally proposed, but personally negotiated scenarios that people create about their unpredictable, yet anticipated future. Life-goals enable people to make everyday decisions about themselves within and in relation to the socio-cultural context in the present that connects their past with their imagined

future. The concept ‘life-goal orientations’ is in the current dissertation chosen to emphasise the time perspective in the movement towards the goals that people choose to have in their lives.

Life-goals are in the current study seen as subjective metasigns, that allow people to define who they are here-and-now that is consistent with who they were in the past and who they want to be in the future. As semiotic constructions that enable people to manage their life-course, life-goals are understood as trans-situational highly generalized metasigns that are integrated into the core of person’s intra-psychological system. The construction of life-goals can therefore be conceptualized using Valsiner’s laminal model (see section 4.5.1). According to this model, personal life-goal construction is intertwined with the socio-cultural context in which the individual is functioning. Whether people decide to pursue certain long-term life-goals or whether they live in the present day without seeking to achieve some future-bound objectives is influenced by the everyday experiences individuals get from their environments. Similarly, social suggestions and environmental affordances affect the content of personal life-goals. Using Bühler’s examples (Bühler & Massarik, 1968), having clear ideas about one’s future professional career may be a normal way of functioning for a young man coming from an American middle-class family, while a youngster, who has lived half of his life with his Indian-origin grandfather in the woods and the second half with his unemployed parents travelling from one place to another, may not have any long-term professional objectives, but rather uses the job opportunities as these emerge. Hence, like other subjective signs, life-goals are constructed by individuals based on their everyday experiences, and they combine social suggestions with individuals’ personal history in an idiosyncratic manner. As highly generalized metasigns they function as semiotic regulators that enable one to make sense of one’s life. As such they can be seen as relatively stable semiotic constructions that have the power to re-configure, integrate and give meaning to personal experiences across space and time contexts (Valsiner, 2007b).

According to Bühler’s theory (Bühler & Massarik, 1968), an individual’s life-course can be divided into several developmental stages. Life-

goal construction is in her opinion not prevalent in all these periods, but only in some of them. Active exploration of one's life-goals starts in late adolescence (ages 15-25). This is the period when many tentative attempts to define one's future trajectory are made. Nevertheless, for Bühler, the main period of life-goal setting is adulthood (ages 25-45), when life-goals in relation to one's career, family, passions and general life-values become constructed, re-constructed and finally defined. Late adulthood (ages 45-65) is the time for evaluation, when people tend to look back at their lives through the prism of their life-goals and assess whether they have been successful in fulfilling these or not. In this period people still have time to set themselves new life-goals which to pursue in their late age. After the age of 65 however, life-goal construction is highly unlikely, for people rather start to settle in their feelings of fulfilment, resignation or failure. Hence, while Bühler's theory suggests that life-goal construction is mostly concentrated to the period of adulthood, her model also points out the importance of life-goals in personal sense-making throughout one's life (the childhood and early adolescence excluded). While the content of life-goals as well as their specificity or abstractness may vary through different periods in one's life, they form an important part of the intra-psychological system, that enable people to make sense of themselves within and in relation to the surrounding socio-cultural context.

The idea of life-goals as highly generalized subjective signs that can guide a person's life and offer the feeling of sameness and continuity has informed the research project reported here. As will become clear later, this idea has been very useful for interpreting data from the empirical study, which looks into the life-experiences and related sense-making efforts of young adults living in a foreign country.

4.6 Dialogue with the other in person-context intertwining

The provided literature review has shown that the question of otherness within the personal meaning space has a particular relevance to the socio-cultural perspective. Socio-cultural context with its manifold cultural artefacts can be

understood as a constellation of different voices of others from the past, present and future that the person can dialogically engage with. Semiotic mediation always entails implicit dialogue with the social other that can sometimes be empowered by explicit social interaction. Hence, the other is always present in the self through person's engagement with collective meaning space and internalization of collective and individual voices within cultural elements. However, different conceptualizations focus on different ways how the otherness within the self can be understood.

4.6.1 Different modes of otherness within the self-system

Gillespie's (2007a) discussion on Vygotsky's sign concept and Mead's similar idea of significant symbol is useful in understanding how the other becomes part of the self-system in a diffused, undifferentiated manner. According to Gillespie's reading of Vygotsky, the subjective sign, that person creates as a result of engaging with the world, functions simultaneously as a personal response to a situation and also as a stimulus for further action for the person as well as to the others. Therefore the sign has "a reverse action". Taking a photo of friends is a personal response to a particular situation. When it gets combined with person's understanding what taking photos in general means in one's culture (e.g. to remember special people, places and moments) it becomes a subjective sign (i.e. a stimulus) for the person to use for remembering, that is understandable and accessible also for others. Therefore, to grasp the collective meaning potential means to internalize the perspective of the other. It means to understand, what my response to the situation means for the other (both in terms of collective meaning but also in terms of personal sense for the other). In order to create a subjective sign the person needs to combine this personal sense (response from the perspective of the self) with the meaning from the perspective of the other. Personal sense can function as a sign precisely because the initial response from an actor's position can be reversed back to the individual and to the others from observer's perspective. Individuals can therefore switch between those simultaneously present perspectives, creating a possibility for internal auto-dialogue that is according to Gillespie (2006; 2007a) the basis of self-reflection.

In addition to this implicit and diffused otherness within self, Hermans' theory of Dialogical Self (see Hermans, 1996; Hermans, 2001; Salgado & Gonçalves, 2007) proposes that other(s) can also be present in the intrapersonal field in a more unmerged manner. According to this theoretical position self can be understood as a "dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous I-positions in an imaginal landscape" (Hermans, 1995, p. 378). The I has a capacity to fluctuate between different I-positions, endow them with a voice and therefore create dialogical relationships between voices from different positions. Thus one can be simultaneously a young and ambitious researcher, a brother, a patriotic Estonian and an open-minded European citizen, and use the personal meaning-systems related to each of these positions to handle certain life situations. In this respect Hermans' I-positions seem to be similar to Holland's identities that are each related to a specific figured world (Holland et al., 2001). In the theoretical frame used in this study, I-positions as semiotic constructions, which enable individuals to make sense of the world and themselves within the world, are conceived as subjective signs.

Additional to the self-positions that the person identifies with, Hermans (2001) proposes the existence of other-positions within intrapersonal field. His other-position is an internalized personal interpretation of someone else's perspective (e.g., "those who think that people living abroad are betrayers of their homeland") that individual uses to construct an understanding of oneself (e.g. "I am not a betrayer but an open-minded citizen of Europe"). Some of these other-positions can be used to create a sustained difference between the self and other, i.e. to define the self through the opposition with the other, while some of these other-positions can function as desirable future or 'as-if' self-positions (e.g. "I am not completely free from Estonians' closed-mindedness yet, but I could be"). According to Gillespie (2007b) these other-positions, which are internalized through person's active engagement with the world, create a preferred zone of development (Valsiner, 1998) for the person, and allow the striving self to become the other, i.e. change social position or identity through occupying a desirable other-position. In other words, taking the other-position enables the creation of new subjective signs that regulate person's behaviour in certain situations. Taking

the other-position can be temporary, as in defining oneself through the opposition with the other in internal dialogue, or permanent, as in becoming the other. While Hermans acknowledges that the dialogue between different I-positions accounts for seeming disappearance of some of them, he stresses the idea of diachronic as well as synchronic plurality of relatively autonomous I-positions and multi-voicedness of the self (Cooper & Hermans, 2007).

Both of the above discussed modes of otherness within the self-system, that is diffused otherness as a perspective of the other within a personal sense and unmerged otherness in terms of other-positions, are taken into account in the current research project⁷.

4.6.2 Self-other dialogue as basis of subjective sign construction and self-reflection

According to Marková (2003b), dialogicality is the fundamental capacity of the human mind to conceive, create and communicate about social realities in terms of otherness. Dialogue with other(s) is the mechanism through which we create knowledge of the world, including ourselves within the world. In this respect our existence is always addressed to someone else (Salgado & Gonçalves, 2007). The other can be another individual, group, society, culture; it is something that is external and strange to us. By externalizing our personal sense and getting a reaction to that from the others in form of an utterance or an action we realize whether our interpretation of other's perspective and of ourselves is intelligible and acceptable. Our self-expressions are directed to the other and only through the response from the other we become aware of the meaning of our message. The meaning is not clear beforehand, but becomes evident only in the reaction of the other as in Vygotsky's reverse action (Gillespie, 2007a). Thus, dialogue is an

⁷ It has been proposed that otherness in cultural elements that have the potential to be used as symbolic resources can be conceived also in a third way: as voice of the author and as voices of protagonists that the person can engage with when using a symbolic resource, such as a novel (Bertau, 2007). However, this third layer of otherness is applicable only to tertiary artefacts and not to other forms of cultural elements. This form of otherness is not the focus of the current study.

attempt to understand how the other has conceived the world and us; it is the understanding of the understanding; the reflection of the reflection – a metacognition (Marková, 2003b).

While dialogue is in the current theoretical framework understood as a process that involves consideration of different perspectives, it is not necessarily conceived as a balanced interaction between these perspectives. In overcoming the strange, by imposing one's own sense on the other or by appropriating some aspects of other's meaning, the self confirms oneself as an agent, rather than fusing with the other in the process of dialogue (Marková, 2003a). Thus, the personal sense and shared meaning that is created through dialogue is essentially relational; something has a meaning in relation to something else; my personal sense is created in relation to other's perspective and it dominates over it. In the current theoretical frame personal sense in terms of subjective sign is understood as a relational combination of different perspectives in which the position of the other is sustained in a passive or tacit mode. Self-other perspectives within a sign are complementary and inter-dependent; they are present in the sign in relation to each other like figure and ground or as inside and outside of a circle (Guimarães & Simão, 2007). Subjective sign takes the form 'X-non X' (e.g., '**it is ok to feel homesick**/it is not ok to feel homesick'). The other position remains in the system in a passive form and can be re-activated when circumstances change and a rupture occurs (see Abbey, 2007a for an example). Hence, the dialogue does not eliminate the tension between the two understandings, nor does it lead to a new synthesised sign in which the two perspectives are merged and the initial oppositions are eliminated. Instead, the strangeness, the other, the non-identical remains to be present in a new subjective sign and therefore within the inner system of the person. Bakhtin (1986/1993; as quoted by Marková, 2003b) used the term 'active empathising' to describe this form of dialogue, which involves the struggle with the other as a starting point for something new, something creative and innovative, as opposed to 'pure emphasising' that eliminates the other.

Conceptualizing subjective sign construction as a process that combines, but does not eliminate different perspectives explains also how

personal sense is created through the other's reaction in internalization (Marková, 2003b; Gillespie, 2007a). On the one hand, the opposition that is embedded in the sign can be understood as the position of the other that gives the meaning. That is to say, the opposite perspectives within the sign in the form of tacit internal dialogue function in the same way as explicit interaction and other's feedback in externalization. On the other hand, the internalization entails integrating a new personal sense with the already existing semiotic architecture of the self (Abbey, 2007a), and therefore the already present subjective signs can function as perspectives of the other that make the new sign intelligible.

Hence, external↔internal movements in terms of internalization and externalization processes are essentially dialogical and constitute a combination of different perspectives. The other is present in the construction and expression of the subjective signs explicitly and/or implicitly. The other becomes part of person's intra-psychological system, but in a way also sustains its separateness, being therefore available to be used as a perspective of the other within the self-system. Hence, the self can treat some aspect of oneself as the other. As Marková (2003b) notes there would be no self without the other or no self-consciousness without other-consciousness. In order to be conscious of myself I need to perceive myself as another, I need to see the other within my inner space. In Vygotsky's words: "I am aware of myself only to the extent that I am as another for myself" (Vygotsky, 1925/1979, p. 29; as quoted by Bertau, 2007, p. 342). Using some aspect of the self as an object of reflection, looking back at it from an observer's point of view allows me to see aspects in myself that would go unnoticed for the unreflective acting self. That is the basis of auto-dialogue (Valsiner, 2002) or self-reflection (Gillespie, 2007a) that is essential for subjective sign construction. Referring to Bakhtin's ideas, Sullivan (2007) argues that self-consciousness arises from the dialogical struggle between the 'I-for-myself' perspective (i.e. action as it is sensed by the actor) and the 'others-for-me' and 'me-for-others' position (i.e. the action as it is seen by others). On the one hand, taking the perspective of the other enables the person to use the surplus the other has when observing the actions of the self from outside (Gillespie, 2003). On the other hand, self has a capacity to go beyond the evaluation from the other (Sullivan, 2007). In making

other's perspective one's own the self can use its open-endedness and interpretation potential to give coherence and continuity to the self-system.

Subjective signs and symbolic resources that combine the perspective of the self and the perspective of the other, allow people to engage in auto-dialogues. They create "an intersubjective structure that enable translations between actor and observer perspectives" (Gillespie, 2007a, p. 689). Self-reflection arises when sign evokes the perspective of the actor and the observer simultaneously and the person starts to switch between those perspectives to look back on the self. It is based on the perceived difference between the two perspectives that enter into dialogue through which new subjective signs are created to regulate one's relationship with the world. These periods of rupture and following transition (Zittoun, 2007a) during which the self becomes the other and during which auto-dialogue between spatially or temporally differentiated selves as others is utilized to resolve the perceived difference and tension are in the focus of this study.

4.7 Limitations of the socio-cultural perspective and the focus of this study

The literature review provided in this chapter has given an overview of the ideas within the general socio-cultural tradition that enable seeing person and context in dynamic intertwinement, taking into account both the agency of the individual as well as the 'power' of the collective. However, this general theoretical tradition also seems to have certain limitations in its current state. Two possible areas of limitations are mentioned here. Firstly, while claiming the mutually constraining relationship between person and socio-cultural environment (Lawrence & Valsiner, 2003), this theoretical approach seems to be more interested in understanding the individual's agency over the influence of the collective. While some approaches within socio-cultural perspective seek to explain the context in its complete inseparability from individual's functioning (Rogoff, 1990; Matusov, 1998), they do not offer analytical tools for differentiating between contexts in terms of their influence on person's functioning. Thus, recent calls for developing a language of description that would make the differences between social contexts

in terms of their allowances and influence on individuals more visible and comprehensible (Daniels, 2007), exemplify the need to tackle this limitation.

The second limitation of this theoretical framework is related to the notion of externalization. Internalization and externalization are considered to be interrelated processes that cannot exist without one another (Valsiner, 1998). However, the emphasis in theorizing as well as in research, seem to be shifted towards internalization. The body of literature that aims to explain how social material is brought over into the intra-psychological field is vast, with more and more specific conceptualizations of dialogicality and otherness being continuously proposed. However, the process by way of which the personal material becomes reflected back to the socio-cultural context and how persons' sense-making efforts produce changes in external plane, has received much less theoretical as well as empirical interest.

The current research project does not seek to address these limitations. Instead, it focuses on another existing gap in socio-cultural theorizing. It is argued here, that with an exception of Valsiner's socio-genetic theory of personality (Valsiner, 1998), a comprehensive account of identity has not been proposed within the general field of socio-cultural tradition. While many models deal with issues of identity, they do not seem to bring together different strands of theorizing within the socio-cultural tradition that would explain the functioning of identity from the general claim of person-environment intertwining, through semiotic mediation, to subjective sign-construction and semiotic auto-regulation, including also issues of dialogicality and otherness. The present research effort seeks to fill that theoretical gap, by offering such a general account.

In the previous discussion several thought-provoking ideas that are applicable also to the conceptualization of identity construction were discussed. These ideas have formed the theoretical basis of the empirical study that was carried out as part of this research project. Introduction to this study will be given in the next chapter, followed by a detailed description of the methodology, developed conceptual model of identity construction and data analysis.

CHAPTER 5

INTRODUCTION TO THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

Up to this point the dissertation has concentrated on the motivation and theoretical background of the reported research project. The focus, as well as the context of the study was discussed in the first two chapters. After that the theoretical basis of the investigation was described. In discussing the theoretical basis of the research project, it was argued that individualistic theories and social constructionist approach of identity provide a limited explanation of this psychological phenomenon. Instead of looking at identity as an entity or considering only the process of identity construction, both of these aspects need to be taken into account. In the previous chapter the ideas within the general socio-cultural tradition were introduced as a suitable basis for developing this kind of holistic conceptualization of identity and identity construction.

The ideas discussed in the previous chapter form the basis of the empirical study that was carried out as part of this research effort. In the following part of the dissertation the focus will turn to describing this investigation in detail.

5.1 Rationale of the study

The empirical study that will be reported in the following two chapters is meant to explore the personal sense-making processes, including identity construction. The study stems from a general idea that identities as subjective signs are not ready-made and stable entities in people's heads, but rather they are semiotic constructions that emerge as a way of coping with a new and unexpected life-situation. In other words, in order to investigate personal sense-making processes, including identity construction, it is necessary to focus on situations where there is a mismatch between the personal and collective culture, where a person's ordinary ways of making sense of oneself and the surrounding world are not effective in the light of new experiences.

In order to find a context where this kind of mismatch is evident and where it would be possible to examine the consequent sense-making efforts, the current study focused on the situation where personal culture comes into contact with a new socio-cultural context. A situation where a person moves to a foreign country for a short or medium term period for studying purposes was thought to offer a suitable context for the study.

The study that will be described in detail in the following chapters concentrates on the exploration of life-experiences of eight Estonians. The young people who participated in the study were born in Estonia and had lived there for the major part of their lives. However, during the one-year period of investigation they were all living in the UK. They had re-located to this country for a relatively short period (0.5 to 3 years) for studying purposes. They all volunteered to participate in the study after receiving an invitation via mass-email.

While the general underlying idea of the study would have enabled to choose whatever group of foreign students in whatever country, it was decided to focus on Estonian students in the UK. Bakhtin (1986) has proposed that the creative understanding of a phenomenon entails the location outside of the object of understanding. He emphasises that the others as outsiders have a certain surplus in seeing things that go unnoticed for people who are emerged into and participate

in the phenomenon. Differently from this suggestion, I decided to choose a group and context with which I was familiar for the purposes of this study. I assumed that the emergence of certain themes in young people's sense-making was related to the specificity of their shared original socio-cultural context, as well as to the particularity of the new environment into which they moved. I believed that my own personal Estonian background, as well as my own experience of living and studying in the UK would make it easier for me to engage with and understand the identity struggles of the participants. Furthermore, the fact that the participants shared a collective meaning space to a certain extent with each other and with me enabled me to manage the enormous variety of their personal experiences and therefore provided indirectly a certain thematic focus for the study.

However, while this shared experience of the context made me an insider to participants' experiences in important ways I was always an outsider to their specific life-events. In other words, while the shared background gave me a way of noticing certain themes and perhaps understanding certain shades of meaning in relation to these, I was a complete stranger to the specific situations that occurred in my study participants' lives and therefore could take the perspective of the other towards these events and their related sense-making efforts. It gave me a chance to ask naïve questions and explanations, a perspective which I sometimes extended also to the matters which I thought I already had an understanding of. In sum, this combined insider/outsider perspective enabled me to get a deeper and richer understanding of the complexities of my study participants' lives and proved therefore to be useful.

5.2 Process of data collection

As can already be assumed from the previous discussion, the present empirical study is qualitative in nature. It sought to get a rich and detailed picture of the lives of the eight Estonian students in the UK and through understanding their personal experiences and related sense-making efforts, to explore their identity construction episodes.

The initial plan for the study was to focus on some specific thematic

content areas where identity construction was expected to emerge. The initial plan was to look for ruptures that triggered identity construction episodes that were related to the participants' being Estonians and their being students. I assumed that similarly to my own experience, my study participants would find these to be areas where their existing ways of making sense of themselves and the surrounding world would not be fitting with the new context. In line with the general aim of the study, I was not interested in understanding what the young people thought of themselves as Estonians in general, nor was I trying to investigate similarities or differences in their self-understandings. I simply believed that these would be the content areas where ruptures may occur.

However, soon it became clear that this assumed focus was not reasonable. Only some participants initially reported ruptures related to these content areas, whereas other themes started to emerge strongly from their accounts. Therefore it was decided to abandon this initial focus and concentrate on participants' life-experiences in their entirety and full complexity. My simultaneous insider/outsider perspective enabled me to make this change easily. However, this initial focus, which was also reflected in the interview and questionnaire design, has influenced the data collection, as will become clear later.

In order to capture the complexity and variety of participants' life-experiences in as much detail as possible a variety of data collection methods were utilized in the study. The specific methods used in the study will be described in the following chapter about methodology. The collected data was thereafter analysed to identify the possible ruptures and the consequent sense-making efforts with the special focus on those sense-making episodes that had the issues of identity at their heart.

5.3 Model development through case study analysis

As already mentioned, the empirical study reported here concentrates on the personal sense-making processes, including identity construction in case of Estonians studying in the UK. However, it is not a study about Estonians'

adaptation and acculturation to the UK society, nor is it a study about Estonian identity. It is a study about identity construction in general. The aim has been to provide data which could be used to develop and thereafter refine a conceptual model of identity construction. In accordance with this general aim, no specific attention has been paid to explaining the identity construction of Estonian students in the UK. No specific hypothesis and therefore no specific conclusions are made about this issue. Rather the question was how the emergent conceptual model can help me to make sense, analyse and interpret the complex personal experiences of these unique individuals.

The conceptual model of identity construction that was developed as part of the investigation is described in detail in Chapter 7 of this dissertation. Thus, it is presented before the details of case studies and their analysis. As will become clear from the chapter about methodology, where the principles of building a generalized model using multiple-case study approach will be explained, the model was not defined before the data analysis, but it emerged from it. Hence, presenting the developed model of identity construction before the case studies does not reflect the exact order of my research activities. However, it provides the reader with a theoretical lense through which to approach the empirical data. Therefore, the reader is invited to read the cases with the focus on the model refinement. The reader is encouraged to look for aspects in the data that are not well-defined in the initial conceptual model and think about ways how these limitations of the initial model could be tackled. A short summary in the end of each case study serves the same purpose and the discussion provided in Chapter 11 about model refinement addresses the identified limitations.

5.4 Presentation of the case studies

The model of identity construction proposed in this investigation was developed through a constant back and forth movement between the theoretical ideas and collected empirical data. Taking this into account it becomes clear that the cases that will be presented in the following pages are not chosen to fit or not to fit the model. In fact, the cases were not at all chosen according to the model. Rather the

model emerged from the case analysis as a way of interpreting the collected data. While the testing of the model in its specific aspects, which would require a concrete focus on case selection, is an important and worthy step in further model development, this was not the aim of the present research project.

The case studies are presented in Chapter 8 of the dissertation in a detailed and lengthy manner one after another. On the one hand, this provides the reader with the complete range of topics that emerged from the analysis of each case and enables to see the applicability of the model to different thematic content areas. On the other hand, the cases are presented in a similar manner because they were treated as equal in the analysis. That is, all the cases were used to test and elaborate the model in a similar way; none of them was chosen to test a specific aspect of the model and none of them was chosen to demonstrate the non-applicability of the model. Therefore, no grouping principle is applied to the case analyses, but rather they are presented in a similar manner one after another. Hence, when reading the case analyses the reader is encouraged to approach each case as a new and unique set of data and consider if and how the model can be used to interpret it.

CHAPTER 6

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This chapter gives an overview of the methodology used to investigate personal sense-making episodes. The chapter begins by pointing out the principles of studying developmental processes and arguing for the relevance of multiple-case study design for arriving at theoretical generalizations about psychological phenomena. The main theoretical assumptions that have guided the design of the study are pointed out here with references to how these theoretical ideas are translated into research strategy. Then the chapter continues with an overview of the recruitment process, a summary of the study participants' characteristics, a description of data collection methods and a portrayal of the study sequence. Thereafter the principles of data analysis are explained. The chapter concludes with ethical considerations, which touch upon three issues: the confidentiality of the participants, participant-researcher relations and dealing with possible life-crises triggered by this investigation.

6.1 Studying developmental processes – implications for the research strategy

6.1.1 Person and context – dynamic and interwoven whole

As explained in Chapter 4 an individual and his/her surrounding socio-cultural context can be understood as intertwined open-ended dynamic systems which depend for their existence upon mutual exchanges (Valsiner & Diriwächter, 2008). These mutual exchanges take place through the reciprocal processes of internalization and externalization (Valsiner, 2007b). Therefore, the person and environment can be conceived as one dynamic, interwoven and inseparable whole. However, in order to investigate the functioning of this whole, analytical or inclusive separation of its components is required (Valsiner, 1998). For the research purposes each component of this larger whole (i.e. person and context) can be conceived as analytically separated open-ended dynamic system. Each of these systems is defined by the structural components within the system, by the relations between those internal components, and importantly also by the relations between the system and other dynamic systems. Hence, while being themselves wholes, person and environment are also interrelated parts of the same system at the next level of wholeness. This latter assumption is central to the inclusive separation. The study of psychological phenomena can therefore focus on the individual's functioning, as far as it is kept in mind that this functioning is embedded within and interlinked with the larger socio-cultural context. The person cannot be considered in isolation, but the question of otherness needs always be taken into account. This approach of studying psychological phenomena that analytically separates the intertwined person and context while paying special attention to their interrelatedness through mutual dialogue is utilized in this investigation.

Person and environment are separated from each other by a boundary that simultaneously separates and connects the two components of the same whole. Internalization and externalization as boundary-processes bring the material from the external to the internal plane (i.e. from one system to another) and then to the external field again in a never-ending cycle, linking these two

systems together. The simultaneous connection and separation function that boundary-processes have is bound up with tension and conflict as the bringing-over and bringing-back-again is accompanied by resistance. The two systems are like tectonic plates that crash into each other and become both altered as a result of this constant contact. This continuous mutual transformation is possible as the structures of the open-ended systems are fluid and always in the process of change (Diriwächter & Valsiner, 2005). The intra-psychological field of the person becomes reconfigured in the contact with surrounding context, whilst the context becomes altered by externalizations of the individual. The internal structure of both these systems becomes modified, as well as the interrelation between them. This process ontological stance (Sawyer, 2002) is taken in the current study that seeks to understand qualitative transformations in person's intra-psychological system in relation to surrounding context.

6.1.2 Idiographic study of developmental processes

Psychological phenomena that work to create and maintain a functional relationship between person and environment are always in the process of becoming and being constructed instead of being stable and fixed. Both maintenance and alteration, i.e., the process of remaining (i.e. X [remains] X) and the process of becoming (i.e. X [becomes] Y) are considered to be developmental (Valsiner, 2007b). Thus, most of psychological phenomena are “in a state of perpetual transition” (Valsiner, 2000, p. 105). That is, they are developmental in their nature. In order to understand these phenomena in their functioning, attention has to be paid to the investigation of intra-individual differences over time. Molenaar and his colleagues (Molenaar, Huizenga & Nesselroade, 2002; Hamaker, Dolan & Molenaar, 2005; Molenaar & Valsiner, 2005) have argued that mathematically it is more accurate to investigate human psychological functioning through intra-individual analysis. Most of the psychological research concentrates on the inter-individual variation and seeks to make generalizations based on a sample to populations (i.e. nomothetic approach); no attention is given to the variance within a single individual across time (i.e. idiographic approach) (Molenaar, 2004). While the research tradition that focuses on inter-individual

variation may be relevant for some purposes, it is not suitable for investigating psychological processes that are in essence developmental. Developmental processes that are related to gradual growth, maturation, decay and loss or sudden 'jumps' to qualitatively different level are by definition varying in time, which makes them nonergodic. According to mathematical laws the structure of inter-individual variation is the same as the structure of intra-individual variation only in case of ergodic processes (Molenaar et al., 2002). Therefore, the studies based on inter-individual variation cannot provide knowledge about developmental processes. In other words, the differences among individuals at a given moment in time (i.e. inter-individual variability) are not informative for understanding the changes in individuals' functioning during the course of their life (i.e. intra-individual variability). Based on this mathematical reasoning Molenaar and his colleagues (Molenaar et al., 2002; Molenaar, 2004) suggest that idiographic approach that uses time series analysis should be utilized in order to understand time-dependent psychological processes. This principle has been also used in the current research project.

6.1.3 Research strategy implemented here

A qualitative longitudinal multiple-case study approach which focuses on the changes in personal meaning-making across time was used in the current research project. It is believed that this research strategy takes into account the theoretical ideas underlying this study. These theoretical considerations are translated into the research strategy in the following manner:

1. In order to investigate identity construction in its wholeness, attention was paid both to the components of that process as well as to the interrelations between those components. The focus of the study on the constant dialogue between person and environment is based on the idea that person and context are intertwined parts of a inseparable whole.
2. The decision to include specific questions into the interviews and in questionnaires that focused on the moments of tension, conflict and interruption in the normal flow of being was informed by the idea that

boundary-processes are tied up with tension and resistance.

3. The idea of open-ended dynamic systems that are in the permanent process of transformation and transition informed the usage of data collection methods that enabled to see the phenomenon in its becoming and maintenance. Semi-structured interviews and quasi-directed questionnaires, which allowed collecting personal narratives about individual's everyday experience and related feelings and thoughts, were used in the current study. Different exercises used in the study served also the purpose of exploring psychological functions in their movement.
4. The idea of studying processes instead of focusing solely on fixed and stable entities guided the choice of using a longitudinal study design. Narratives of personal life-experiences throughout a one-year period were collected in order to see the dynamics and fluctuation in one's feelings and thoughts. Personal narratives in the form of spoken or written text were taken as externalizations of personal sense. The evident fluctuations and changes in the discourse were taken as indications of ongoing personal sense-making.
5. The focus on time-dependent psychological processes led to the usage of an idiographic approach in the current study. The aim was to carry out a multiple-case study in order to understand personal life trajectories and reveal the intra-individual fluctuations and dynamics across time.

While this kind of research strategy is assumed to be in accordance with the theoretical underpinnings of the study, this methodological choice raises questions about the possible outcomes and contribution of the work. The ontogenetic trajectory of the individual that is in the focus of the current study is unique. Therefore, it needs to be considered how scientifically relevant and acceptable knowledge about psychological functioning based on single case analysis can be constructed. In other words, if the realization of each individual's life-trajectory is unique, how can the analysis of individual cases lead to the creation of universal scientific knowledge?

6.2 Generalizations based on case studies

The case study has become an increasingly acceptable and widely used investigation strategy in social sciences in recent years (Yin, 2003). This research strategy is based on the idea that behind individual uniqueness lay universal psychological processes that become realized in unique ways throughout a person's life (Molenaar & Valsiner, 2005). These universal processes can be revealed by detailed investigation of a single case or of multiple single cases. According to Yin (2003) the case study approach is suitable: "When a "how" or "why" question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control" (p. 9). Furthermore, the case study strategy is suitable for these research projects that seek to build or test a theoretical model about psychological phenomenon (Eisenhardt, 1989). However, it needs to be understood that the generalized conceptual model that is constructed based on unique case studies is not informative about inter-group variability and does not enable making generalizations to populations, while being suitable for arriving at theoretical generalizations. In Yin's (2003) terminology, this research strategy enables to make analytic generalizations instead of statistical generalizations.

The generalized model of a psychological phenomenon that enables one to make analytic generalizations can be constructed using a grounded theory approach advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967). In their view, the researchers should approach their case studies without pre-determined theoretical assumptions, but rather enable the theory to literally emerge from the data. Utilizing this 'theory-free' approach, the initial model should be constructed using the data from repeated time series analysis of a single case. This preliminary model can thereafter be used to analyse another single case, making modifications and alterations to the initial model. The case comparison can be repeated using other cases, thereby revealing a generalized model of a psychological function (Sato, Yasuda, Kido, Arakawa, Mizoguchi & Valsiner, 2007). As the model-building is embedded in the unique individual cases, the possibility of arriving at many similar, but slightly different theoretical models is high. In order to deal with this potential difficulty, types and typologies can be used as part of the

theory (Toomela, 2007). Therefore, the generalized model does not necessarily need to include a description of one single possible trajectory, but rather explains the emergence and interrelatedness of several possible unfolding trajectories of the same process (Sato et al., 2007).

In contrast, Yin (1981; 2003) promotes an approach of case study research where the theoretical model is developed prior to the data collection. In this approach the single case or multiple cases are used to test the preliminary theoretical model. The cases can either be used to allow literal replication of the theory (i.e. the cases are in accordance with the theory) or to enable theoretical replication (i.e. the cases lead to predictably contrasting conclusions) (Yin, 2003). In the latter instance, the case selection becomes especially important.

The aim of the current study is to offer a general theoretical model of identity construction. The study does not seek to make generalizations about all Estonian students or about Estonian students in relation to other groups. Therefore the above described knowledge construction approach that enables building a generalized model based on multiple-case analysis and making analytic generalizations is believed to be suitable for the current study.

The present research project is embedded in the socio-cultural theoretical tradition, which has guided the design and focus of the empirical study. The multiple-case study approach used in this study combines the two approaches of case study research described above. On the one hand, the socio-cultural tradition functioned in the current study as a flexible conceptual framework which guided the data collection and analysis. In this respect, the research strategy used in the current study is similar to the case study approach advocated by Yin (2003) and Flyvbjerg (2001). On the other hand, these theoretical ideas were not brought together to form a coherent conceptual model of identity construction prior to case selection, data collection and analysis. Instead, the conceptual model emerged from the data and was thereafter tested using data from other cases. In this sense, then, the study is using Sato's suggestions about the creation of generalized model (Sato et al., 2007).

6.3 Study participants

The current study seeks to explore the everyday experiences and life-trajectories of young people from Estonia living and studying in the UK. This specific group was chosen for the study for several reasons. First, it was assumed that in order to investigate personal sense-making processes a situation where tension between personal and collective culture emerges would be suitable. It was also supposed that this kind of stress is more likely to occur in situations where a person comes into contact with a new socio-cultural context. A situation where a person moves to a foreign country for a short or medium term period for studying purposes was therefore thought to offer a suitable context for the study. Second, researcher's personal ethno-cultural background and familiarity with participants' original socio-cultural context was believed to enable deeper understanding of young persons' possible experiences and struggles in a new environment.

The recruitment of study participants started in May 2006. The initial plan was to include in the study only those young Estonians who had never lived in the UK before. In order to gain access to individuals coming to study in the UK, several institutions were contacted: Tallinn University, Tartu University, Tallinn Technical University, the British Council in Estonia, Archimedes Foundation in Estonia⁸ and the Estonian Embassy in London. Each of these institutions provided the author either with names and email addresses of young people who were planning to start studies in the UK, or sent an invitation letter provided by the author to the people whose contacts they had. The invitation letter is available in Appendix A. Due to the fact that some of the potential participants were contacted by the author, while others were informed about the study by the helping institutions it is not possible to give a final number of people who were informed about the study.

As a result of these contacts it became increasingly clear that it would

⁸ Archimedes Foundation is responsible for providing scholarships for studies within the European Union.

not be possible to limit the group of participants only to the people who had never lived in the UK before. As this would have resulted in a very limited number of participants it was decided to include in the study also those persons who had previously lived in the UK. The negotiations with all the interested individuals ended in a final group of nine people who committed to participating in the study over a one year period. This initial group of nine participants was available for the data collection until April 2007. During this period one of the study participants failed to answer to the repeated emails and phone calls of the author and was therefore excluded from the study.

In order to motivate the individuals to participate and maintain their motivation over the one-year period, each participant was promised a book voucher valued 500.- Estonian Crones (approx. £20) after the completion of the study. The voucher was given to the eight participants who stayed in the study for the whole period.

The summary of the basic characteristics of the eight participants, who took part in the entire study are provided in Table 6.3. More detailed background information about each participant is given in the beginning of each case study analysis in Chapter 8.

Table 6.3 Summary of the basic characteristics of study participants

Code	Gender	Age	Field of studies	Time spent in the UK	Planned period of stay in the UK	Contacts with the UK prior to arrival
A.	male	31	Social Sciences	2 years	4 years	None
E.	female	19	Arts and Design	Arrived in Aug. 2006	3 years	Worked in the UK since Aug. 2006
H.	female	23	Social Sciences	Arrived in Sept. 2006	0.5 year	None
L.	female	20	Business Administration	9 months	3 years	None
N.	female	21	Law	1 year	3 years	None
P.	female	25	Environmental Studies	Arrived in Oct. 2006	1 year	None
R.	female	25	Humanities	Arrived in Oct. 2006	1 year	None
T.	female	19	Engineering	Arrived in Sept. 2006	3 years	(Worked in Ireland for two months)

6.4 Design of the study

This section gives a detailed description of all the data collection methods used in the study, as well as providing a general overview of the sequence in which the study was carried out. It also offers a description of specific exercises used as part of different data collection methods, with stated purpose of each exercise. Despite the careful planning, the initial design of the study had to be modified during the course of the one-year period due to the unforeseen circumstances. Hence, the description of the data collection methods includes references to the initial plans and their later modifications, where needed. A critical evaluation of the study design and data collection methods will be given in Chapter 10.

6.4.1 Individual interviews

During the one year study period, three individual interviews were conducted with each study participant. The initial plan to have two individual interviews – one before the beginning of the academic year (in August or September 2006) and the other at the end of the academic year (in August or September 2007) – was modified and an additional interview in the middle of the study period (in April 2007) was added. This decision was made in order to maintain an efficient research relationship with the participants, as well as to compensate for the lack of details and depth in the descriptions of one's everyday experiences that was evident in some cases.

All the interviews were non-directive and semi-structured. Only general topics to be discussed in the interviews were chosen before-hand. This flexibility enabled the interviewer to focus also on the themes that emerged during the interview and allowed advantage to be taken of the uniqueness of the single cases and the emergence of new themes. As usual in case study research, the data collection and analysis overlapped (Eisenhardt, 1989). The continuous analysis of emerging data that pointed to the themes that could be further probed, fed into the interview schedules.

All the interviews were conducted in Estonian, which was the mother

tongue of all the participants, with the exception of one participant whose mother tongue was Russian, but who considered herself to be bi-lingual and was fluent in Estonian. Each of the interviews lasted approximately 1.5 hours. All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The permission to do so was obtained from each participant at the beginning of the first interview and confirmed again at the start of each following interview.

6.4.1.1 Content of the interviews

The initial plan was to conduct the first interview before the participants' arrival to the UK. However, due to their and the interviewer's commitments and living and travelling arrangements, this was not possible in all cases. Out of the final eight cases, four first interviews took place in August 2006, in Tallinn, Estonia; the other four interviews were conducted in September 2006, in England, three of them in London and one of them in Bath. The aim of the first interview was to start building an efficient research relationship with each participant. The first interview concentrated on understanding the personal background of the participant (e.g. information about one's family, educational trajectory and professional life, as well as intimate relations), as well as the motivation for undertaking a study abroad, ideas and expectations about the UK, English people and one's forthcoming experience.

The second interview was conducted with one of the participants in the end of January 2007. This individual was in the end of her planned six months study period in England and it was decided to have an interview with her prior to her return to home. The interview took place in England, in the city where the person studied.

The second interview was conducted with the remaining seven participants in April 2007. The interviews took place in England, in the cities where the participants studied, with the exception of one interview which took place in Tartu, in Estonia. The aim of the second interview was to get a more detailed understanding of the participants' experiences abroad up to that point in the study. The interview concentrated on person-specific themes that had emerged from the

questionnaires, and aimed to collect deeper and more detailed accounts of the important life-events and their significance to the participant. The second interview also touched upon participants' future plans. In addition to these person-specific questions two general questions were asked from all the interviewees: 1) Have you experienced any situations where you were considered Eastern-European? What were your feelings and thoughts about that experience? 2) Have you had any situations where you were considered to be similar to Lithuanians or Latvians? What were your feelings and thoughts about that experience? These two questions were raised by the personal experiences of some of the study participants, and as these issues were informative for the initial plan of the study, they were given special attention.

The time of the third interview depended largely on the commitments and travelling and living arrangements of the participants. In order to take into account the wish of two participants who were starting another experience abroad in the late summer 2007, their final interviews were carried out in early August 2007, in Tallinn, Estonia. The interview of another participant who spent her entire summer in Estonia was also conducted in the same period in Tallinn. In order to cater for the needs of two other study participants who were finishing their Master's studies in the early autumn 2007, their final interviews took place in the middle of September and early October 2007, in the cities in England, where they studied. The rest of the interviews took place in the middle of September 2007 in England in the cities where the participants lived. The aim of the third interview was twofold: first, to look back at the experiences of the last period of the study and collect more detailed accounts of the significant events and their personal meanings from that period; second, to look back at the entire study period and analyse one's life-trajectory in terms of positive and negative periods throughout the year. Some time was spent in the final interview to obtain feedback about participation in the study.

6.4.1.2 Exercises used in the interviews

Several exercises were used in the study to make the data collection process more versatile, to enable the participants to discuss their experiences in variety of ways,

and through that improve the data collection process and quality of the data. The specific aim of each of the exercises is pointed out in the description of the task. However, it is worth mentioning here that the usage of most of these exercises was inspired by Vygotsky's (1978) double-stimulation method. Specifically, this was the case with self-description exercise, drawing task and video viewing.

Vygotsky's approach to studying psychological functions in their formation is based on the idea that all human development is mediated by cultural tools that are semiotic in nature. In this kind of research setting external devices are introduced to the study situation by the researcher and taken up and put into use in an idiosyncratic manner by the study participant. Therefore the stimulation in the study situation is twofold: the task that needs to be solved, and the cultural tools that can be used to facilitate and improve the resolution of the task. According to Vygotsky's reasoning, in order to understand the psychological functions in their development it is important to understand how a person engages with both of these strands of stimulation and how these become part of a person's functioning. Therefore, this methodological approach allows one to see how external becomes internal and how it guides the development of intra-psychological semiotic tools. It has been extensively used by Engeström (Cole & Engeström, 2007; Engeström, 2007) in his developmental work research that concentrates on problem solving and innovation within groups.

In the current research Vygotsky's methodological ideas were used in a general manner. That is, the exercises were included in the study situations in order to facilitate participants' contemplation and discussion processes. They were not designed to be developmental in the narrow sense of the word, but instead aimed at revealing the personal sense-making process in its movement as it transforms the intra-psychological system. In this respect the usage of the exercises in the current study is more similar to Engeström's usage of cultural tools in developmental work research than to Vygotsky's original utilization of this methodology (e.g. to study the development of concept formation).

Self-description exercise. A self-description exercise was used in the current study in order to explore the self-understandings of the participant. This task was used in the first and in the final interview. The aim of the exercise was to equip participants with a tool that could be used to facilitate contemplation about one's self-understandings. While a pre/post-design was used in the study, the aim was not to measure the change in participant's self-understandings as captured by the exercise, but rather to facilitate a discussion about possibly relevant aspects of personal sense.

The self-description exercise was carried out as follows. The participant was provided with an A3 format white paper and 20 cards that each had a word written on it. Some of the words were adjectives (e.g. Pretty, Reserved); others marked the group categorization (e.g. Estonian, Scandinavian). The complete list of words used in the exercise is provided in Appendix B. The words used in this exercise were collected during a pilot study in which 11 people (nine female and two male) were asked to write down 20 words that for them were associated with the word 'Estonian'. The words used in the study were the ones mentioned most frequently. In addition to this standard set of cards, the person had also four blank cards which he or she could use in order to add other relevant words.

In order to complete the exercise the person was asked to write in the middle of the paper his or her name. After that the participant was asked to place the cards around the centre in a way that the words which described him/her the best, were close to centre and the ones that did not match his/her self-description, were far from the centre. When all the provided cards were placed on the paper, the participant was asked if there were any words missing from the description. In case he/she identified such words, he/she was encouraged to use the blank cards to add relevant self-descriptions. After all the cards were placed on the paper the choices the person had made were discussed.

The exercise was piloted on two Estonian women before using it in the study. The participants of the pilot were asked to evaluate if the words written on

the cards were suitable for self-description, and provide feedback about the exercise in general. As a result of the pilot one word, namely 'Nordic', was added to the list of words. Otherwise the task was evaluated to be relatively easy to complete, and playful.

As explained earlier, the self-description exercise was used in this study for the discussion facilitation purposes. No specific analysis of the produced pictures was carried out. For that reason the pictures which were produced by the study participants are not presented in the dissertation.

Life-trajectory drawing task. In order to facilitate the discussion about one's life-experiences during the study period a drawing task was used in the final interview of the study. Similarly to the self-description exercise, the aim of the usage of this task was to offer participants a tool that would enable them to talk about their experiences in a more structured and easily accessible, whilst playful manner.

In order to complete the task the participant was provided with an A3 format white paper and a box of colour pencils. He/she was asked to draw a line on the paper that signified his/her experiences during the previous year in which 'hills' marked the positive periods and 'valleys' marked the negative periods. The participant was encouraged to use different colours when drawing the line. She/he was also asked to either write on the drawing or to explain orally what were the important events in each 'hill' or 'valley' that triggered the positive or negative emotions. The suggestion was also made to give names to the 'hills' or 'valleys', if these came to one's mind. The participant was also encouraged to use symbols, pictures or other means to illustrate the drawing. When the participant had finished working on the task the drawing of the personal life-trajectory was discussed. The completed drawings of the participants are presented in Appendix F.

6.4.2 Questionnaires

In order to investigate the personal life-experiences of the participants as these occurred and to discover critical moments in their life-trajectories during the one-

year period, which triggered identity construction process, questionnaires were sent to the participants once a month via e-mail. The aim of the questionnaires was to collect personal narratives about personal life-experiences and feelings and thoughts related to those. While the interviews would have enabled one to explore the life-events retrospectively, the usage of monthly questionnaires allowed the gathering of more recent and immediate reactions to significant every-day situations. Estonian was used as the language of the questionnaires.

The questionnaires used in the study included up to five open-ended questions that enabled the participants to describe their life-experiences during the previous month. Each questionnaire included some general questions that were asked to all the participants, and some person-specific questions. Using the theoretical underpinnings of the study, the general questions used in the questionnaires concentrated in many occasions on situations where tension and struggle was evident (e.g. describe a situation from the last month where you felt that you were different from people around you). Many of the questions were used repeatedly in the questionnaires in order to see how persons construct meanings in relation to the same input in different moments in time. A complete list of questions that were over the study period given to all the study participants, together with general instruction used in the questionnaire is given in Appendix C.

As noted by Eisenhardt (1989) in case study research the data collection often overlaps with data analysis. This principle was used also in the current study where the data from interviews and previous questionnaires were used to create person-specific questions. These aimed at following-up the emerging topics, and seeing how certain themes develop in relation to person's flow of experiences.

Sentence completion exercise. In addition to the questions about daily experiences, every second questionnaire, starting from the first questionnaire, included a sentence completion exercise. The beginnings of the sentences that needed to be completed by participants are provided in Appendix D. The aim of adding this exercise into the questionnaires was to investigate the possible

fluctuations and changes in a person's feelings and emotions in relation to his/her original and new collective culture, as well as in relation to her own way of being. While the answers to open-ended questions were aimed at providing a general picture of the events happening in students' lives and their reactions to these, the sentence completion exercise was designed to bring out the changes in more general aspects of the personal meaning space. Furthermore, the sentence completion exercise enabled the triangulation of the data (Eisenhardt, 1989) and seeing whether the periods of tension and conflict that were evident in other data were revealed also by the fluctuations in sentence completion task.

Participants' answers to the sentence completion exercise throughout the study period are presented in a complete manner in Appendix E.

6.4.3 Focus Groups

The initial plan of the study was to combine individual-level and group-level data collection methods. This decision was mainly informed by the wish to see how individuals take up and use in their sense-making ideas that were collectively constructed and/or discussed. The experience of debating certain ideas collectively was thought to enable tracing the movement of the voice from collective to personal plane.

The initial plan was to carry out two focus groups that would have involved all the participants of the study – one after the first round of individual interviews at the beginning of the academic year and another after the final individual interviews at the end of the academic year.

The first focus group was carried out as planned. However, due to the commitments and living and travelling arrangements of the participants, it was not possible to conduct one focus group with all the participants. Instead two focus groups were conducted: one in August 2006 in Tallinn, with four participants and the other in September in Bath with five participants⁹. The first focus groups were

⁹ The person who later dropped out from the study participated in this focus group.

conducted in Estonian and both lasted approximately 1.5 hours. The focus groups were tape-recorded and videotaped.

The main aim of the first focus groups was to explore the concepts that participants as a group held about Estonians. In order to gather participants' ideas about Estonians and Estonian-ness a brainstorming exercise was used. In addition to that the participants were shown a video clip where three non-Estonians, namely Russian, Irish and Italian, were speaking about Estonians in a slightly provoking manner. The video was filmed, edited, translated and subtitled by the author. The main aim of the video usage was to create tension between the ideas participants held about their nationality and compatriots, and the ideas other people may have held about Estonians. Therefore, the video was once again used as a tool to facilitate discussion and to reveal the issues that otherwise would have perhaps been left un-discussed. The video viewing was followed by an individual exercise to explore the feelings and ideas raised by the film, and group discussion.

The second focus group was planned to take place at the end of the study after final individual interviews. The aim of the second focus group was to present some of the data gathered during the study to the participants and ask them to reflect upon it. However, in the second part of the study it became clear that due to participants' commitments and travelling and living arrangements it would be extremely difficult to organize a second focus group. As the focus of the study had during the data collection period increasingly shifted towards an intra-individual analysis, and the input from the initial focus group did not seem to re-occur in individual meaning-making processes, the decision was made to abandon the attempts to create links between cases by using the data from focus groups. That is, the idea of tracing certain collective voices from the focus group in personal sense-making was abandoned. As a consequence the data from the initial focus groups were not transcribed and not used in further analysis.

Video from the focus group as input for recollection exercise. The usage of the video clip in the first focus group had a second motive. The video viewing was initially planned to be followed up by questions about the film in the

questionnaires. As a result of this decision the participants were asked to recollect and write down as precisely as possible everything they remembered from the video in the fourth and seventh questionnaires. The initial idea that originated from Frederick Bartlett's (1932/1995) memory studies was to explore how the recalled stories of the participants would become transformed over time. The links between these transformations and other relevant personal meanings were intended to be analysed. However, it became clear that personal recollections collected with the questionnaires were short and general, probably due to the relatively long time-lapse between viewing and recollection. Also other themes started to emerge from the questionnaires and interviews within each case that seemed to be more relevant than the recollection exercise. Due to these reasons it was decided to exclude that part of the data from further analysis.

6.4.4 General sequence of the study

Table 6.4.4 depicts the general sequence of the study. It points out when certain data collection methods were used and which specific exercises were included in them at different moments in time.

Table 6.4.4 General sequence of the study

2006					2007											
Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.		
Interview 1 Focus Group	H., L., P., R. A., E., N., T.	Questionnaire 1	Questionnaire 2	Questionnaire 3	Questionnaire 4	Interview 2	Questionnaire 5	Questionnaire 6	Interview 2	Questionnaire 6-2	Questionnaire 7	Questionnaire 8	Questionnaire 9	Interview 3		
		All	All	All	All	H.	All	All	A., E., L., N., P., T. R.	H.	All	All	All	H., L., N.	A., E., P., T.	R.
Tallinn	London, Bath					Place of study			Place of study	Tartu				Tallinn	Place of study	
Self-description exercise (Interview) Video viewing (Focus Group)		Sentence completion exercise		Sentence completion exercise	Recollection of video		Sentence completion exercise				Sentence completion exercise Recollection of video		Sentence completion exercise	Life-trajectory drawing Self-description exercise		

6.5 Principles of data analysis

6.5.1 Stages of data analysis

The data analysis carried out in the current study concentrated mostly on the intra-individual analysis and sought to reveal the dynamics of sense-making within a single case across time¹⁰. While the idea of tracing collective voices in personal sense-making, that was initially intended to connect the individual cases, was abandoned in the course of the study, other ways of conducting inter-case analysis opened up. In the following sections the principles of intra-case analysis are described first, and then the ideas informing the inter-case analysis are presented.

6.5.1.1 Intra-case analysis

The within-case analysis carried out in the current study consisted of the following stages:

1. Identification of re-occurring themes within each case. In this stage the interview transcripts and questionnaires were read through by the researcher and themes that were re-occurring throughout the study period were extracted. In this first stage all the topics that were re-emerging and which were significant for understanding the life-experiences of the individuals were extracted. At this stage it was not yet considered whether a change in self-understandings in relation to these topics was evident or not. Rather all the topics that were considered to be important for understanding each case study were extracted.

2. Identification of personal meaning-making episodes. In this second stage the text was once again read in order to reveal the topics in case of which personal meaning-making efforts were evident. In this stage those initially extracted topics in case of which the text did not disclose any fluctuations, dynamics or movement

¹⁰ The term *intra-individual analysis* is used in this dissertation to refer to the analysis within a single case, as opposed to the *inter-individual analysis*, which investigates the differences and similarities between cases. It is acknowledged here that the former term may not fully represent the conceptualization of personal sense-making as a boundary-process that connects person and context. However, as it enables to differentiate between the two types of analysis, it is used here, despite its conceptual shortcoming.

between different perspectives were abandoned. The analysis at this stage resulted in a list of quotations that were grouped together according to the general re-emerging topics. In addition to that, a timeline analysis table for each case was produced in order to indicate at which moments in time during the study period specific topics occurred. The timeline analysis tables are included to each of the case study analyses.

3. Formulation of the conceptual model based on a single case analysis. In this stage of the analysis a random case (the case of N.) from the pool of eight cases was chosen for a detailed analysis. The data from this case was approached using the general socio-cultural theoretical ideas. Most importantly the idea of the collision between the personal and collective cultures that becomes resolved through auto- and hetero-dialogues was used. Interpretation of the data using this idea led to the formulation of a basic cycle of sense-making, including identity construction: rupture → semiotic auto-regulation → re-establishment of person/context equilibrium. This basic cycle, which forms the core of the conceptual model, was thereafter combined with other previously discussed theoretical ideas which led to the initial formulation of the schematic representation of the cycle (see Figure 7.1) Thereafter the analytic categories were defined (see section 6.5.2).

4. Analysis of the remaining cases based on the conceptual model. The initial conceptual model was thereafter used to interpret another case (the case of H.), which based on the initial reading was believed to be more complex than the first case. The analysis of this second case consisted of two steps:

- the previously extracted quotations were analysed using the analytical categories; the text in each quotation was assigned a code that enabled to use the quotations easily for the final analysis of each topic;
- each re-occurring theme within the case was analysed using the formulated conceptual model; in particular, this meant using the schematic representation of the identity construction cycle to capture the dynamics within each theme and thereafter writing down a description of this

dynamic using the relevant quotations; these schematic drawing and the respective narrative description form the main part of each intra-case analysis.

During the second case analysis the schematic representation of the identity construction cycle was modified several times, resulting in the final scheme that is presented in Figure 7.1. Only after the model proved to be suitable for interpreting also this second case, was it written down in a detailed manner. This description is presented in the following chapter. At this stage the initial description of the model was not anymore modified but used for analysing the remaining six cases. The analysis of these remaining cases was carried out according to the previously described two steps.

6.5.1.2 Inter-case analysis

As mentioned earlier, the initial aim of linking the detailed intra-case analyses together by tracing the movement of the collective meaning to personal sense-making was abandoned during the data collection period. However, the data analysis phase of the study opened up another way of carrying out an inter-case analysis. It was realised that in order to deal with the emerging need to further explore the notion of rupture in personal sense-making, an inter-case analysis can be fruitful. Therefore, after the completion of the intra-case analysis the trajectories of each individual case were explored in order to bring out the cross-case patterns, with the specific focus on the events in study participants' lives that appeared as significant ruptures. This inter-case analysis aimed to bring out similarities and differences in those ruptures and their effects on personal sense-making across cases.

Using the developed model of identity construction, it was assumed that each of the themes, in case of which sense-making efforts were evident, included a reference to one or many serious ruptures. Therefore, these ruptures were considered for understanding the individual life-trajectories and using these ruptures, a trajectory of each individual was constructed. Before exploring the cross-case patterns in those trajectories and related ruptures, the trajectories were

triangulated using the drawing of the one-year experiences that participants completed as a result of the life-trajectory drawing exercise.

6.5.2 Analytical categories used in the analysis

The analytical categories used in data analysis emerged from the analysis of the first case as explained in the previous section. When defining the analytic categories, the definitions given by the authors who have proposed certain concepts, have been used. The analytical categories used in the study are defined as follows:

- Person's claims about one's present, past and future being (self-understandings) – these are identified in the discourse as person's claims about who one is, was, will be, would like to be or should be; the self-understandings that are relevant for the current analysis are the one's that are in some way contradictory or between which the tension exists.
- Person's life-goal orientations – these are identified in the discourse as person's future-related self-understandings, as a goal or image of oneself towards which the person is striving; life-goal orientation appear in the text often as explicit claims about how the person or person's life should be in the future.
- A rupture – rupture is a situation or experience that interrupts the normal flow of events (Zittoun, 2007a); it is defined by its consequences, i.e. a life-event is identified as a rupture only if person's discourse reveals that the event has caused tension, discomfort, stress or unease to the person and initiated personal sense-making.
- Voice of the other – “a voice is a referenced quotation of other” (Gillespie, 2006, p. 159); voice is defined as person's claim about other's opinion about an issue at hand.
- Tension as it is carried forward to the next moment – this category is defined as a stress, discomfort or unease that continues to be mentioned and brought up by the person despite the evident efforts to work through

the matter and reduce the tension.

The analytical categories match the components of the proposed theoretical model. The different kinds of relationships between those components are not hereby defined as separate analytic categories. However, understanding the different types of relations between different parts of the dynamic system forms an important aspect of the analysis as will become clear from the case analyses.

The detailed coding of the text according to these analytic categories is not presented in this dissertation. The themes where the personal sense-making efforts are evident are described within each case and a schematic depiction of the dynamics within each theme is added to the descriptive text. This schematic representation enables the reader to see what parts of the text were coded and analysed under each analytic category.

6.5.3 Language of data analysis and quotations

All the interviews were transcribed verbatim, but not translated into English. The data analysis was conducted based on Estonian transcriptions and only the excerpts used in the dissertation were translated into English. This translation was done by the researcher. While the translation aimed at keeping the general ‘feel’ of the language as used by the participant (e.g. formal or more colloquial; grammatical difficulties in Estonian, hesitations in language use and search for better expression or word), the structure, clarity and grammar of the language of the excerpts was improved for comprehension purposes when translating.

6.6 Ethical considerations

6.6.1 Confidentiality of participants

In order to protect participants’ identities and secure their confidentiality the following principles have been used in the current dissertation:

1. The names of participants have not been used in the dissertation. Instead, each

participant is signified by a randomly chosen letter. The case studies are presented in alphabetical order.

2. The specific field of studies of each participant has not been mentioned, but rather a general area of specialization is given.
3. The names of the universities where participants studied have not been mentioned. However the region in England where they lived and studied has been stated in order to allow the reader to understand the socio-cultural context that in some cases is relevant (e.g. living in London as opposed to a small town in the Midlands). Due to the impossibility of finding a suitable alternative in the UK, the name of the capital city has been left unchanged in the text.
4. Participants' birth place in Estonia is not stated, unless the birth place was Tallinn or Tartu (i.e. the capital and second largest city in the country), where the size of the city makes it difficult to identify the person in question.
5. When other places have been mentioned by participants in relation to their past or future experiences (e.g. living abroad before coming to the UK), the name of the country or city has been changed to another country or city from the same region, with the exception of the USA, which has been stated in an unchanged manner due to the impossibility of finding a suitable substitute.
6. The background information about the participant includes only those facts about the participant's life which do not reveal his or her identity. In making decisions about the inclusion of certain facts, Estonian context was used as the reference point, as the confidentiality is more difficult to maintain there due to the scale of the country and strong inter-personal links among people.

As a further step in protecting the identity of the participants, as well as validating the data analysis, each study participant was sent an electronic copy of his/her case analysis with the request to point out any details that should be changed or omitted from the analysis. As a result of this process, some changes to the personal background information were made. Only the final version of each case, where participants' requests have been taken into account, has been included

in the current dissertation.

The data collected during the study is stored in the researcher's personal files and have not been openly discussed with anybody who is not directly linked to the current research project.

6.6.2 Participant and researcher relationship

The process of the study and its longitudinal design has led to the creation of personal links between the author and the study participants. The researcher's conscious efforts to be informed about the occurring events in participants' lives and being encouraging, supportive and interested in those dealings (e.g. wishing good luck for the exams, sending Christmas cards) should not be underestimated in maintaining and developing these relationships during a one-year period. Without doubt this contributed to retaining the participation in the study during the 12-month period.

While the relationship remained relatively formal with some participants, it developed into a more personal and trusting relationship in other cases, as demonstrated by the depth of the personal information revealed to the author by some participants. This strong personal relationship enabled to gather information about personal life-experiences that significantly contributed to the success of the study. However, it also created some difficulties and discomfort during the study period for the author. Sometimes it was complicated to find a proper balance between creating strong enough links to gather important information, but at the same time remain distant enough to be able to take the role of the observer. In dealing with these difficulties the researcher preferred not to allow the relationships with participants develop into very informal friendships that would have made it difficult to make decisions about the inclusion and exclusion of certain information about participants' lives. While being interested in participants' life experiences in a new socio-cultural context, the researcher also tried not to share her own experiences of living in England, as this might have brought certain themes unnecessarily to the attention of the participants. Similarly, when discussing participants' experiences, no references were made to

other study participants, despite the interest expressed by some people in the study.

6.6.3 This investigation as a significant rupture in study participants' lives

The underlying idea of the current research project is that certain life-events can create ruptures in individuals' normal flow of being that trigger personal sense-making efforts, including identity construction. From this perspective any given life-event, no matter how insignificant it may initially seem can escalate into a subjective sign construction that can have significant (negative) consequences to people's lives. Therefore, in this section about ethical considerations, it is important to think, to what extent was the current investigation a rupture in study participants' lives.

There is no reason to believe that the participation in the current study created a rupture in any of the participants' lives that had serious negative consequences to their normal flow of being. Clearly, the constant gaze from the other, in this case from the researcher, interrupted the normal flow of these young people's lives in some ways. It made them to reflect about their experiences and furthermore, express those reflections in written form. It made them think about things that they would probably not have thought about otherwise. Therefore, the presence of this observing and question-asking other in their lives during a one-year period certainly had consequences to their personal sense-making.

However, while being always present this observing other tried not to be too demanding and intrusive in her interests. When a new theme was picked up from the ongoing data analysis and enquired about in an interview or questionnaire, the person was always given a possibility not to discuss the topic if she or he did not want to. On the one hand, this enabled the participants to maintain their privacy. On the other, it served as a way of avoiding to create a serious rupture by way of not bringing some themes to the surface of one's awareness.

While there is no evidence to suggest that this study created a serious

rupture or an existential crisis in any of the study participants lives, this possibility was always kept in mind. The researcher tried to be attentive to possible clues about this kind of effect on one's being: someone being overly philosophical, overly critical or simply expressing their ideas about their life in a lengthy and/or melancholic manner. It was decided that in case any of these tendencies were noticed the issue would have been taken up with the participant in a personal interview and a suggestion to turn to professional counselling would have been made if needed. Hence, it was assumed that while the researcher would not have been responsible for creating a crisis in individual's life, she would have been responsible for not involving other appropriate parties to the resolution of the situation.

A situation that did raise researcher's concerns about a possible existential crisis in one of the study participants' lives did occur during the study period. This crisis was not created by the participation in the study, but by other events in this young person's life. The researcher reacted to her growing concern by writing to the person and offering to meet and talk about the situation in her life. When the person politely refused the offer, it was made sure that she had other supportive people available in her social network to who she could turn to if she needed help. While the continued observation showed that this situation found its resolution without the further involvement of the researcher, it did surface the possible dangers of this kind of research and the need to think about possible ways of dealing with those.

CHAPTER 7

CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

In this chapter the conceptual model of identity construction that was developed in this study is described. The chapter begins with a brief overview of model which is accompanied with the schematic illustration of the identity construction cycle. Thereafter, specific aspects of the model are described in a more detailed manner.

7.1 Brief overview of the model

According to this model, identity construction is understood as part of person's ongoing sense-making process. Identity is seen as personally significant and highly generalized subjective sign that becomes created as a result of the ongoing sense-making.

The current model of identity construction takes as its basis the following cycle of sense-making: rupture → semiotic auto-regulation → re-establishment of person/context equilibrium. This basic cycle, which has been used before by others, including Dewey, Mead (Gillespie, 2006) and Piaget

(1977), has here been combined with theoretical ideas elaborated within the general socio-cultural tradition. The movement of the self-system from one identity construction cycle to another is presented in Figure 7.1.

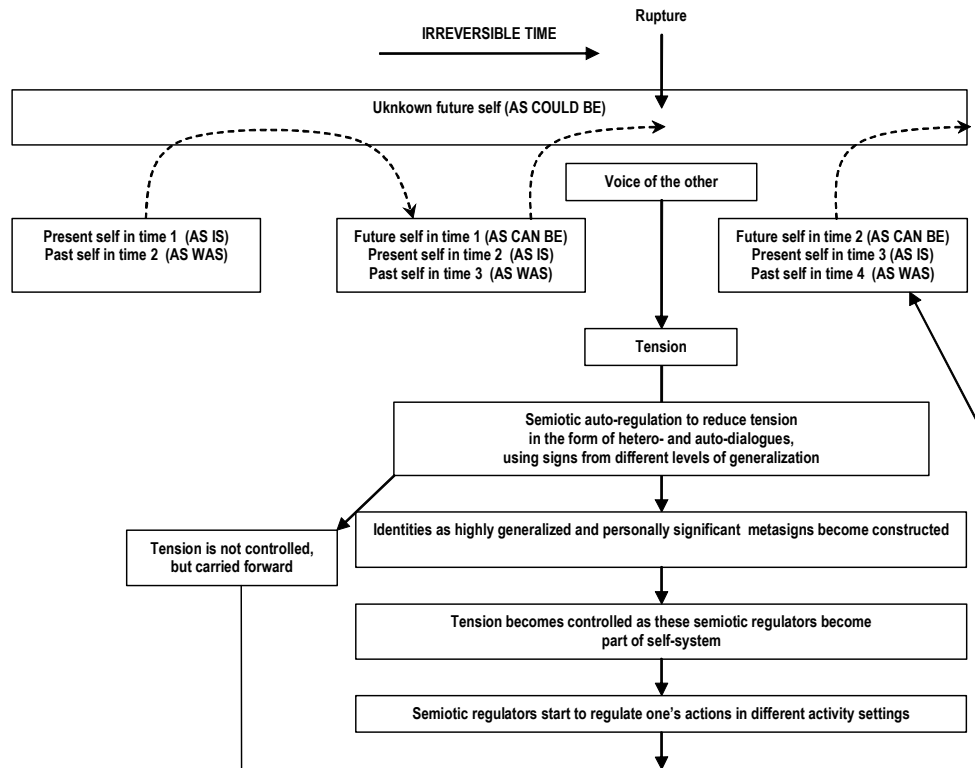


Figure 7.1 Conceptual model of identity construction

The current model of identity construction seeks to capture the processes by way of which the person moves from the past through the present into the unknown and unpredictable future. It seeks to capture the developmental transformations of the self-system on the level of self-understandings as subjective signs. In other words, it seeks to capture the episodes of subjective signs construction, including identity construction.

The subjective sign construction is triggered by a rupture. The rupture creates a break in the normal flow of one's being (Zittoun, 2007a) and triggers

semiotic auto-regulation that aims to re-establish the sense of stability and continuity beyond the rupture.

This movement towards the re-established state of balance in the future beyond a rupture uses and is guided by the existing subjective signs in self-system. In this context two analytically differentiated types of signs are important. First, the highly generalized and personally significant metasigns in form of life-goal orientations regulate this movement from the past through the ruptured present into the future by generating different possible future scenarios. Second, person uses also previously constructed identities as highly generalized and personally significant signs in this movement into the unknown. Both identities and life-goal orientations offer the person a sense of sameness and continuity. However, life-goal orientations do this by giving a direction to one's life in terms of values and principles, while identities enable the person to define who one is and wants to be. While being interlinked, life-goal orientations and identities function as highly generalized and personally significant metasigns which are created based on person's past experience with the world and with oneself and through the dialogue with social suggestions.

A rupture triggers semiotic auto-regulation. This is played out as a dialogue between the existing subjective signs in the self-system, including life-goals and identities, and new incoming social suggestions. The hetero-dialogues with different voices of the others and auto-dialogues with past and anticipated future selves in the semiotic auto-regulation process function to reduce the tension. In the process of semiotic auto-regulation some existing subjective signs become strengthened and remain the same, continuing to regulate a person's actions in particular activity settings. Other subjective signs as semiotic regulators may disappear and some new regulators may become constructed in order to control the tension between different perspectives within the self-system.

However, semiotic auto-regulation may not always be successful in controlling the anxieties immediately. Instead, the tension may remain in the self-system. Nevertheless, some form of semiotic regulation of the inner tension is assumed in the current model for the efficient functioning of the self-system. It is

proposed here that the human existence in the world is guided by a need to create sense of sameness and continuity, which does not necessary entail coherence, across time and space.

Let us now turn to considering the ideas used in the current conceptual model in greater detail.

7.2 Identity as constructed metasign

As already said, identity is, in the current model, understood as a person's subjective sense of sameness and continuity across time and space. This sense of sameness exists on the level of subjective signs (i.e., self-understandings), and is achieved through semiotic auto-regulation. It is constructed based on unique, but seemingly similar reactions to different everyday experiences (Sovran, 1992). It enables people to answer in a personally meaningful way such questions as Who am I?; Who am I in relation to others?; Where do I come from?; Who do I want to be? etc. Hence, subjective signs that the active individual uses to define oneself involve self-understandings that are related to a person's identification with certain social categories (e.g., "I am Eastern-European"), but they also involve claims about oneself that are related to a person's psychological states and characteristics (e.g., "I am a reserved person"). In addition to those claims about one's being, life-goal orientations as trans-situational, highly generalized metasigns form an important part of the self-system. While being linked with the claims about one's being, life-goal orientations are analytically differentiated here from these, for the purposes of clarity.

All these different subjective signs are used to make sense of the present situation with reference to a person's past experiences and possible future being. This constantly re-constructed sense of self in the present connects the remembered past with the unknown future in a personally meaningful way. Identity construction is therefore understood as a personal sense-making process that creates an episodic clarity and stability on the level of meanings in the flow of unique everyday experiences.

Subjective signs are constructed based on a person's active participation in specific activity settings. They originate from person-environment dynamic intertwining, where a person's reactions to specific situations send a message to others, and receive feedback from them, while also working back on the self without others' response, as in Mead's feed-forward loops (Valsiner, 2007d). Hence, the reaction to specific life-events says something about the person. It becomes interpreted by the person him/herself and others into several new signs as the recursive semiosis is initiated (Rosa, 2007b). As these signs enter the outer-most layer of the person's intra-psychological system they become re-interpreted in the light of existing subjective signs. The cascade of multi-stranded recursive semiosis is set in motion and through that an image of the self emerges. In this process some constructed signs become rejected, while others become transformed through dialogues with other signs into more abstract and generalized metasigns until they reach the inner-most layer of the self-system. Once integrated into a person's intra-psychological field, highly generalized metasigns start to function as organizers and regulators of a person's emotions, actions and knowledge within and in relation to the surrounding world. They can be used as mediators that enable the reconfiguration of the situation.

7.3 Domains of experiencing and identity construction

Identity as an episodic 'steady state' of sense of sameness and continuity is constructed through "three mutually embedded domains of continuous experiencing – microgenetic, mesogenetic, and ontogenetic" (Valsiner, 2007b, p. 301). All human functioning in a socio-cultural context is situation-specific and therefore unique. That is to say, in the flow of irreversible time, two personal reactions to emerging everyday experiences are never equal, but differ to a certain extent. Nevertheless, the reactions on the first, micro-genetic domain can also be perceived as similar, as belonging to the same fuzzy category of similarity, based on which a sense of sameness becomes semiotically constructed (Valsiner, 2007a). These signs of sameness are thereafter transferred to the second, i.e. mesogenetic domain. Here they are distanced from the specific contexts where they originally emerged, and formed into abstract and trans-situational metasigns

that can be used in personal sense-making under new circumstances. The subjective signs on this domain are still unstable enough to be discarded as unnecessary and unusable, but nevertheless stable enough to be reflected upon and discussed, which can lead to further generalizations. In the latter case, the trans-situational signs become generalized to the third, ontogenetic domain, where the highly generalized metasigns start to function as regulators of personal life-course management. Hence, the signs constructed through these three domains differ in their level of generalization or distancing (Valsiner, 2007b).

Importantly, these domains of experiencing are interlinked. The signs that are constructed in each of the domains feed into the maintenance, modification or rejection of the signs on any other domain through recursive semiosis (Rosa, 2007a). In regulating the emerging tensions related to one's everyday functioning, the individual may use the signs from all the three domains. These signs, which differ in their level of generalization are brought together as a bricolage in one's consciousness, based on which the person constructs a reaction that is functional in a specific activity context. The recursive semiosis on the micro-genetic level feeds into the creation or alteration of generalized metasigns on meso- and ontogenetic levels. For example, the person who has always wanted to become a doctor (i.e., overwhelming generalized life-goal orientation) may suddenly find out that he doesn't like the sight of blood and has to alter his life-goal (e.g., "Why don't I become a psychiatrist instead?"). Similarly, the downwards regulation of sense-making occurs. Personal meaning-making situations in specific activity settings (i.e., separate micro-genetic episodes) become linked to each other through general life-goal orientations, which the person is seeking to achieve in his/her current life-course situation (i.e., highly generalized metasigns from the onto-genetic level). For example, a young woman who declares to be driven by a general life-goal of becoming rich seems not to be using that metasign in her decision to start the Ph.D. studies instead of continuing in her well-paid job; rather she seems to be guided by another image of the self (e.g., "I am someone who wants to learn") in that decision. However, this life-goal orientation can be used as the guiding principle in a later situation, where, after constant struggles with her initial choice, she eventually continues her career in

the same well-paid sector after finishing the doctorate. Eventually, these two separate, even contrasting decisions may become linked in a meaningful manner, when the person creates another generalized metasign: “I am a person, who is still searching for one’s way in life”.

Hence, the current model proposes that in the semiotic auto-regulation phase of the identity construction cycle a variety of subjective signs with different levels of generalization are used. Through the dialogue between all these different signs certain highly generalized and personally significant metasigns become constructed as a functional reaction to the situation that thereby solves the inner tension.

7.4 Rupture as a trigger of identity construction

Self-understandings are considered to be tacit meaning spaces within a person’s intra-psychological system, which regulate a person’s functioning within a socio-cultural context without the individual being necessarily aware of them. The semiotic auto-regulation that uses signs at different levels of generalization functions most of the time without a person’s conscious efforts. Engeström’s (2006) parallel with mycorrhizae, the invisible complex structure underneath visible fungi that sometimes produces mushrooms, is useful in this respect. Using this illustration, identity can be understood as a mushroom that “pops up” when the conditions are correct. In other words, identity is not a fixed entity in people’s mind that they carry with them from one situation to another, but something that becomes constructed when one’s life-situation so requires.

The questions about one’s identity are brought into the individual’s awareness by a sudden change in a socio-cultural context that brings along a rupture (Zittoun, 2007a). Rupture creates an interruption, a break in the normal flow of events, where the present functions as a divide between known past and unknown, but imagined future. Rupture destabilizes the self-system by making the perspective of the other “visible” in a person’s meaning field.

The emergent difference between the perspectives is achieved through

the relational nature of meanings. That is to say, the meaning is always created in relation to something and that other is maintained in a tacit and passive mode in a subjective sign. When a new social suggestion enters into the self-system it faces the existing semiotic architecture of the self-system. The new meaning is ‘assessed’ in relation to the existing ones. The voice of the other that says “Brits don’t have a good opinion about Eastern-Europeans” is evaluated in relation to an existing idea “I am Eastern-European”. But the rupture does not necessarily have to bring a new perspective from the outside. The difference can be also “awaken” within the existing meanings that are relational in their nature. The idea of being Eastern-European is created in relation to other ideas (e.g. “I am non-Eastern-European”, for example Nordic or Scandinavian). The emergence of this sign evokes those other meanings. In Vygotskian terms, the perspectives of the self and the other collide and set the stage for their dialogue, leading to a possible new qualitative state (Yaroshevsky, 1989). In sum, as a result of the rupture, a person becomes aware of his/her way of being, as well as realizing that this way of being may not be functional under the changed circumstances. In this respect rupture is a multi-furcation point that opens up different possible future trajectories for the person, out of which one becomes realized (Sato et al., 2007).

By making the voice of the other “visible” in the intra-psychological system and bringing the continuing unpredictability of the future on the horizon into a person’s awareness, the rupture generates tension, ambiguity and uncertainty within the self-system. The equilibrium between the person and the surrounding environment that was created by sense-making becomes disturbed. The tension triggers semiotic auto-regulation that seeks to re-establish the balance through new cycles of recursive semiosis (Rosa, 2007b). The transition period that follows a rupture can be conceptualized as a movement away from a previous *status quo* towards a new relative stability on the level of meaning. The transition period is characterized by the person’s sense-making efforts that aim to reduce ambiguity, uncertainty and tension and lead to the restructuring of the individual’s intra-psychological meaning field. The specific reactions that emerge on the microgenetic level feed into the negotiations of self-understandings on the mesogenetic level and life-goal orientations on the ontogenetic level. In order to

re-establish the *status quo* beyond the rupture, the person can construct new and even more generalized meta-signs, alter the existing ones or block the movement of the incoming message with the already constructed self-understanding.

Once the inner tension becomes controlled through semiotic auto-regulation, the questions of identity fade into the background. The answers to these questions that created a temporary state of clarity and stability enable the person to move on to the future. Until these ways of making sense of the world and one's being in it are functional, i.e., provide equilibrium between person and environment, they are actively not dealt with, and the semiotic auto-regulation operates with these signs without the person's awareness.

CHAPTER 8

CASE ANALYSIS

As described in the methodology chapter, a longitudinal multiple-case investigation was used in the current study to reveal the personal meaning-making episodes. In the present chapter a detailed intra-case analysis of the life events and related meaning-making efforts of the eight study participants is presented. The cases are analysed using the conceptual model of identity construction presented in the previous chapter. In the end of the chapter the inter-case analysis is presented.

8.1 The case of A.

8.1.1 Background

At the outset of the study A. is 31 years old. He comes from an Estonian family and has a sister. He was born in Tallinn, but spent his university years in Tartu, the second largest city in Estonia and the main university city in the country. Due to the nice living environment and distinctly academic atmosphere in Tartu, A. claims to identify more with that city than with Tallinn and sees himself living there again one day.

During the time of the study A. is continuing his doctoral studies in London, in one of the most prestigious universities in the country in the field of social sciences. He has studied abroad since the graduation from his B.A. studies, but had never been to the UK prior to his arrival. At the beginning of the study he is starting his third year in London.

8.1.2 Timeline analysis

The analysis reveals four main themes with related sub-themes that keep appearing in A.'s interviews and questionnaires (see Table 8.1.2):

1. I am my partner's partner now:
 - Me and my career
 - Longing for someone to love
 - New relationship
 - Combining the career and the new relationship
2. My life between London and Tartu:
 - Longing for home and Estonia
 - My home is not in Estonia anymore
 - Idealized picture of Tartu
3. Am I prolonging my childhood?
 - Feeling different from friends in Estonia
 - Is my life sterling?
4. I am simply a Londoner and Estonian:
 - I am proud to be Estonian
 - Estonians are too narrow-minded
 - Being Eastern-European
 - Being Nordic
 - Ethnicity is not an issue for me

Table 8.1.2 A. – Timeline analysis

	Sept. 2006 INT	Oct. 2006 QUEST	Nov. 2006 QUEST	Dec. 2006 QUEST	Jan. 2007 QUEST	March 2007 QUEST	April 2007 (begin.) QUEST	April 2007 (end) INT	May 2007 QUEST	June 2007 QUEST	Aug. 2007 QUEST	Sept. 2007 INT
I am my partner's partner now												
Me and my career	x					x		x				
Longing for someone to love			x			x						
New relationship					x	x		x	x	x		
Combining career and new relationship					x			x			x	x
My life between London and Tartu												
Longing for home and Estonia	x			x				x				
My home is not in Estonia anymore	x	x		x	x		x	x				x
Idealized picture of Tartu	x				x			x				
Am I prolonging my childhood?												
Feeling different from friends in Estonia	x	x			x		x					
Is my life sterling?			x		x							x
I am simply a Londoner and Estonian												
I am proud to be Estonian						x	x					x
Estonians are too narrow-minded								x				
Being Eastern-European	x		x					x				x
Being Nordic	x			x								x
Ethnicity is not an issue for me								x				x

Most of the themes that occur in A.'s talk are related to his plans for the future and his ideas about his current life as it is moving towards the future. The timeline analysis shows that in the first half of the study these thoughts are mostly focused on A.'s career plans and his struggles of finding his place between London and Estonia in a manner that is rewarding for him, but also acceptable to others. In the second part of the study, this focus shifts to A.'s new relationship, to planning the future together with his partner, no longer only in relation to the possible return to Estonia. The topic of ethnicity emerges throughout the study period due to the intervention. However, as will become clear from the thematic analysis, it is something that A. deals with also in his normal flow of experiences, as the question of being Estonian is relevant from the point of view of his possible

return to his homeland.

A.'s answers to the sentence completion exercise are relatively consistent and similar throughout the study period, pointing possibly to the fact that the year of study is free of serious negative ruptures (see Appendix E, Table E1). The answers about Estonia and Estonians reveal the different positions from which A. looks at his homeland and compatriots. Nevertheless, these fluctuations that will be discussed in more detail in the thematic analysis are not drastic. It allows the assumption to be made that, while A. is engaged in certain inner negotiations about his place in the world and his future plans, these are not urgent problems in his life that need to be resolved immediately, but rather a normal part of his functioning.

8.1.3 Thematic analysis

8.1.3.1 I am my partner's partner now

A.'s decision to go to study abroad is guided by his wish to have a successful and rewarding career in academia. As a young and ambitious man he has used this life-goal orientation as a guiding principle in his life until now (see Figure 8.1.3.1): *"My general plan has been, yes, my academic career is very important for me. I want to achieve quite a lot, I'm quite ambitious. I think I'm capable of doing that"* (INT1, 09/06). He is also planning to use that metasign as a guiding principle in the future: *"Thinking in those categories that oh, I want to have a hugely successful career, then strategically it would probably be smart to stay somewhere abroad for a while after completing the Ph.D. In this country or somewhere else, in a good university, it doesn't matter. To show that you are capable of succeeding in the foreign context also as a professional. Not to be only a good Ph.D. student, but to be also a good, successful lecturer, who gets published a lot"* (INT1, 09/06). However, A.'s talk reveals another life-goal orientation that is important for him: *"The life of a Ph.D. student [...] leads to the situation where relationships are very difficult to maintain, so it is like some long-distance relationships [...] So in that sense life is very unstable and irregular and then, of course, you think... Funny enough, lately I feel homesick, I don't know*

what exactly can cause this” (INT1, 09/06). Having a successful career requires travelling and that instability has made it difficult for A. to create and maintain a stable relationship. The two metasigns: “I want to have a successful career” and “I want to have a stable relationship” have until now been antagonistic and that creates tension. The voices of the others, especially his best friends in Estonia, who become parents and get married, add further anxiety. Interestingly, in his attempt to manage this tension A. clings to the idea that stability is related to the home in Estonia. It seems that there is an idealized picture in his mind about Estonia, especially Tartu, where he can finally settle down and have a stable relationship, after he has had his success. Hence, the tension becomes controlled by an imagined future situation where the two metasigns are combined. Sometimes A. feels the need to bring that anticipated future to the present as a way of regulating the feelings of loneliness: “*But lately I feel like, what if I go home instead*” (INT1, 09/06).

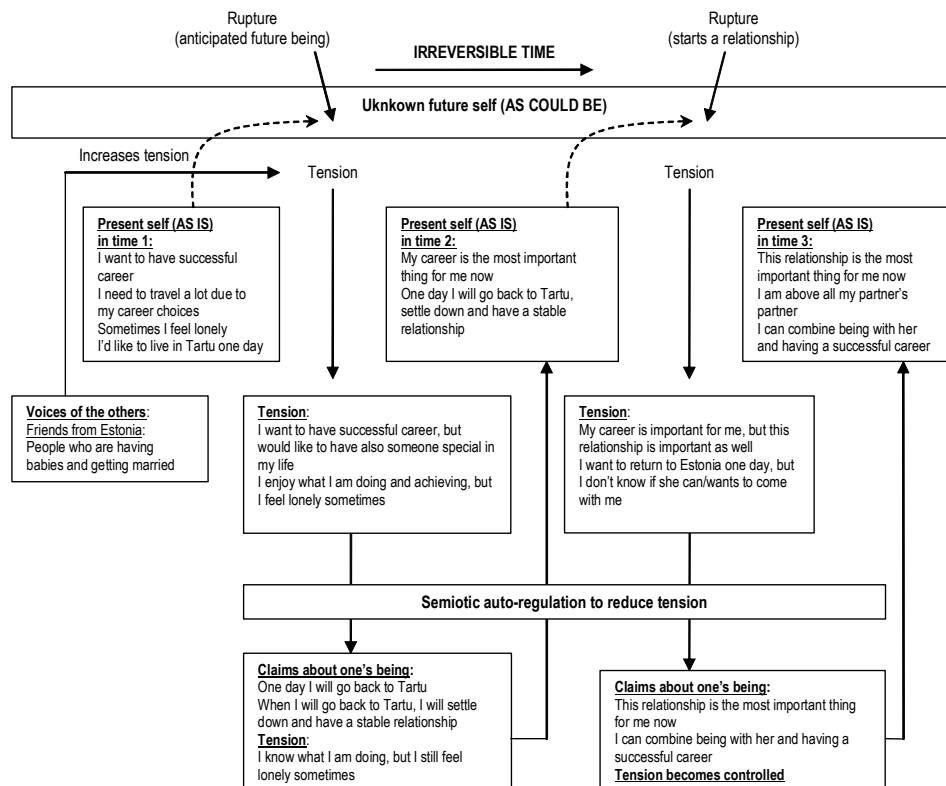


Figure 8.1.3.1 A. – I am my partner's partner now

While the prospect of having a stable and rewarding private life seems initially to be related to the return to Estonia, soon this semiotic construction starts to change. A. becomes involved with a woman who also lives the life of a young academician in one of Europe's capitals. Starting this new relationship can be considered as a rupture in A.'s life, which causes some tension and makes him reconsider his plans and re-define himself in relation to his life. The focus from an imagined return to Estonia and having a stable relationship there shifts to the reality of being in a relationship: *"The relationship with the partner is important in the sense that this status, I have a partner... or let's say it is important there in my consciousness perhaps. Or... my partner's partner"; "Going abroad has always meant that my academic career was more important than my private life. I have not prioritized my relationships and they have ended. Now I think the private life [pause] is rather a priority. [...] Now I make my career decisions, I negotiate with my partner what to do and how to do. To be with her is more important than other things. Or other things are also important, but I try to make compromises that are nice and reasonable"* (INT3, 09/07). The new self-definition "I am the partner of my partner" is very desirable and attractive for A., and therefore it quickly starts to function as a prism through which to look at one's life and one's choices.

8.1.3.2 My life between London and Tartu

It seems that A. defines himself as someone who at the moment lives in London, but who will one day return to Estonia. He sees himself as a patriotic person, who wants to contribute to Estonian society. However, this self-definition needs to be considered also in the context of A.'s funding conditions – after completing his doctoral and possible post-doctoral studies he has to return to Estonia and take on an academic post there. Hence, influenced by real material circumstances, A. constructs a picture of his life that now unfolds in London, but in the future will continue in Estonia.

A.'s movement from the present towards this undefined, but imagined moment in the future is on the one hand characterized by deepening disconnectedness from the life in Estonia (see Figure 8.1.3.2): *"I don't feel to go*

to Estonia really, because I don't really have a place there" (INT1, 09/06); *"This spring for example I didn't go to Estonia. The reason being, on the one hand I have not much to do there (and at the same time there are loads to do here). Second, I have nowhere to stay there – I don't really feel like sleeping and living on parents' living-room floor. And third, I just don't feel the need to go – probably I don't have anymore or right now this strong emotional need to see the parents and friends, live my old life etc."* (QUEST, 04/07). He feels increasingly that his life is in London, where he can do the things he likes and live the way he likes: *"My home is here for now and here I feel good, I can do things I like in a way that I like etc."* (QUEST, 10/06). On the other hand, A. has created in his mind an idealized picture of the possible life in Tartu: *"Why don't I go to Tartu University? Start to work! Teach! Stability! Start to enjoy the results of the work I've done until now. In that sense a kind of idealized picture of possible life in Tartu becomes created"* (INT1, 09/06). This ideal picture sometimes collides with his current way of living and makes him doubt whether he could handle the move from metropolitan London to small Tartu: *"I went to Tartu in the middle of January [...] to the place, where I enjoyed living etc., that I have idealized while living abroad and that I've wanted to connect my future with – staying there for several days I tried to understand, how would it be to live there, would I like it there etc. [...] The answer was that probably it would be quite okay. I had quite a positive feeling. But when I returned to London [...] and suddenly I was in this milieu, I immediately found myself thinking that this is home where I want to stay for a long time"* (QUEST, 02/07).

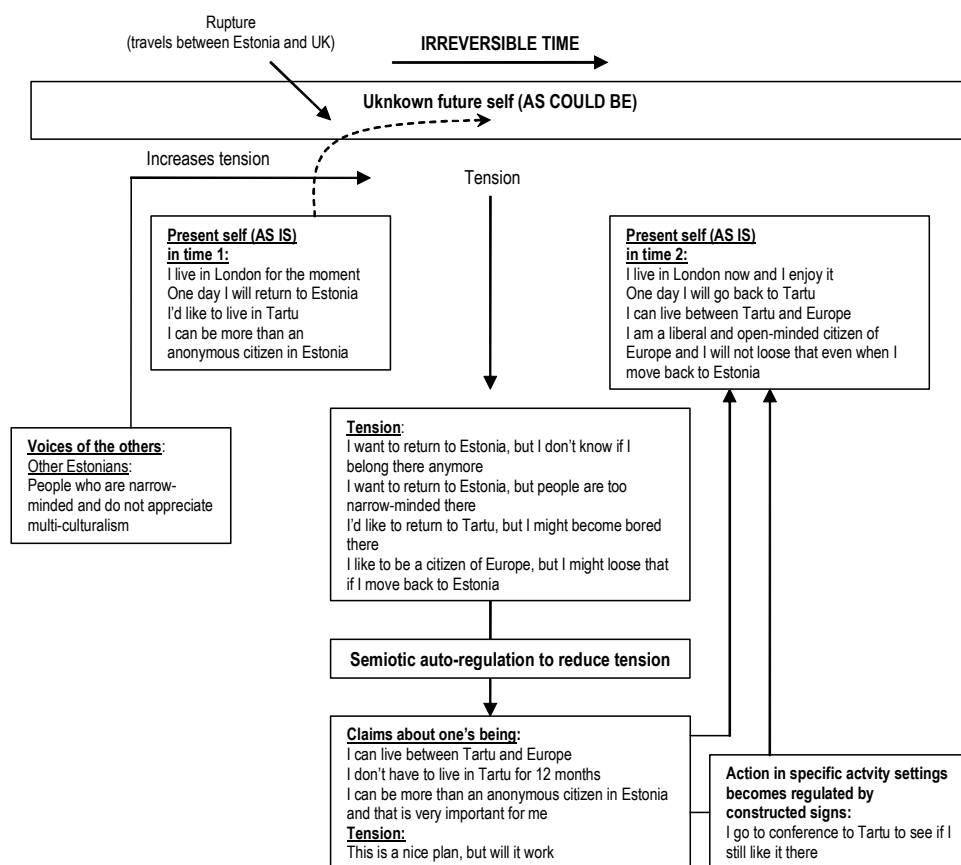


Figure 8.1.3.2 A. – My life between London and Tartu

Despite these tension-creating everyday experiences and fluctuations, A. holds on to the picture of life in Tartu, trying to make it fit into his future and way of being: “*Yes I do want to go there, do that, but I definitely think that I don’t have to be there for 12 months. [...] And that is a kind of little thought that seems sympathetic to me. To share my time between, let’s say, Estonia and some other place somewhere in Europe*” (INT2, 04/07). Being a person who is driven by a wish to be successful and influential, A. believes that his possibilities to contribute to society are greater in Estonia: “*This is definitely an important difference between Estonia and abroad, and a reason I want to return to Estonia. I feel that there I have better chances to realize myself, to change something, to have an impact, to participate, to be somebody. Here I am just an anonymous citizen*” (INT1, 09/06). This possibility of being somebody is seen as a positive factor that drives A. towards Estonia. However, he feels that while being in Estonia enables

him to be in the centre of that society, it may place him in the periphery of the world: *“The more I think, the more I am, I want to continue moving freely. Probably... At least in Europe. I can’t imagine... And I have probably developed, I don’t know if it is European identity. Being European means differentiating oneself from the rest of the world. It is not in the sense of differentiating, but in the sense of thinking and acting freely. I feel natural in this environment; it doesn’t feel like going abroad. Or like, I go abroad from Estonia, I go to Europe. It’s not that, it’s my environment. And I definitely want it to stay this way. And I am afraid that if I go there to Estonia, perhaps I’ll get stuck there, and all this will somehow remain closed. Somehow I like this feeling of being able to take the train from London and go there and Berlin or the natural ease of doing these things”* (INT2, 04/07). The question of being European emerges as a possible answer to A.’s inner tension. It is not a ‘thing’ A. has developed and carries around with him, but a specific way of handling a tension-filled situation. In addition to this anxiety about losing the ease of movement, and freedom of thinking and acting in Estonia, the voices of the others make A. feel that his choices in life and way of living may not be understood and accepted in Estonia, and that creates further tension: *“My worldview is quite liberal and when I read some Estonian, read Estonian news [...] well you can feel some sort of hostility towards strangers or a certain concern towards multicultural society, difference, open Europe. And that makes me upset and I can’t understand it”* (INT2, 04/07). Hence, the everyday experiences of being in London and of being in or away from Estonia influence A.’s image of his future life in Estonia. The tensions related to the movement towards this imagined future are not resolved, but carried forward despite of A.’s efforts to construct and re-construct an image of the future life in Estonia that would match with his present being.

8.1.3.3 Am I prolonging my childhood?

A.’s self-definition as a young, ambitious and open-minded academician who considers Europe to be his environment allows him to function effectively in London (see Figure 8.1.3.3): *“Here the freedom, being free from this pressure here in London. You feel, you are not, all the others around you are the same. Or*

like, to have, to live in a rented accommodation is completely normal, nothing special. You are not an idiot if you don't get a mortgage. And in general, you can be a scientist and be relatively free from social obligations also in your age. Or at least you don't feel that you are socially obliged to do something. This is a positive aspect that I value a lot" (INT1, 04/06). His way of being is normal in London. However, the visits to or contacts with Estonia create a rupture into this normal flow of life. He feels that his way of being in the world and his way of defining himself are not compatible with the ways of being in Estonian society: *"Some sort of freedom that you have here in London. You are over 30, but you don't feel this total social pressure that we have in Estonia. In that age you need to have achieved something and if you are just a Ph.D. student, you are doing your research or something, you are just a nonsense bloke. You are just wasting your time, prolonging your childhood; this is precisely what I've been told in Estonia. That [pause] in Estonia, if you are away for a bit longer, you immediately feel... Others, who have returned from abroad have said this as well, someone I know who lives in Paris, says that he comes to Estonia, is there for a week and already feels that he should get a mortgage and buy a flat. This is the way you do it*" (INT1, 09/06). A. not only perceives the mismatch between his life and general way of being in Estonia, but he also feels different from his friends: *"My best friends became parents for the first time. Unexpectedly, it made me sad and made me once again question my life – how sterling is it in the end. Not that I have doubts about my choices, it's more that I have some sad moments when I think about the world I've lost and feel that I don't have this constant supportive closeness and other joys of that kind"* (QUEST, 11/06). These seem to be the moments when A. understands that he shares the same life-goal orientations with his friends (e.g. to settle down and have a stable relationship) but has not been successful in fulfilling his goals. This felt difference creates tension and he doubts whether his life is as valuable as the life of his friends: *"Perhaps there in Estonia I feel that if others are living their adult lives, I'm still prolonging my childhood and perhaps have not taken the full responsibility in life"* (QUEST, 10/06).

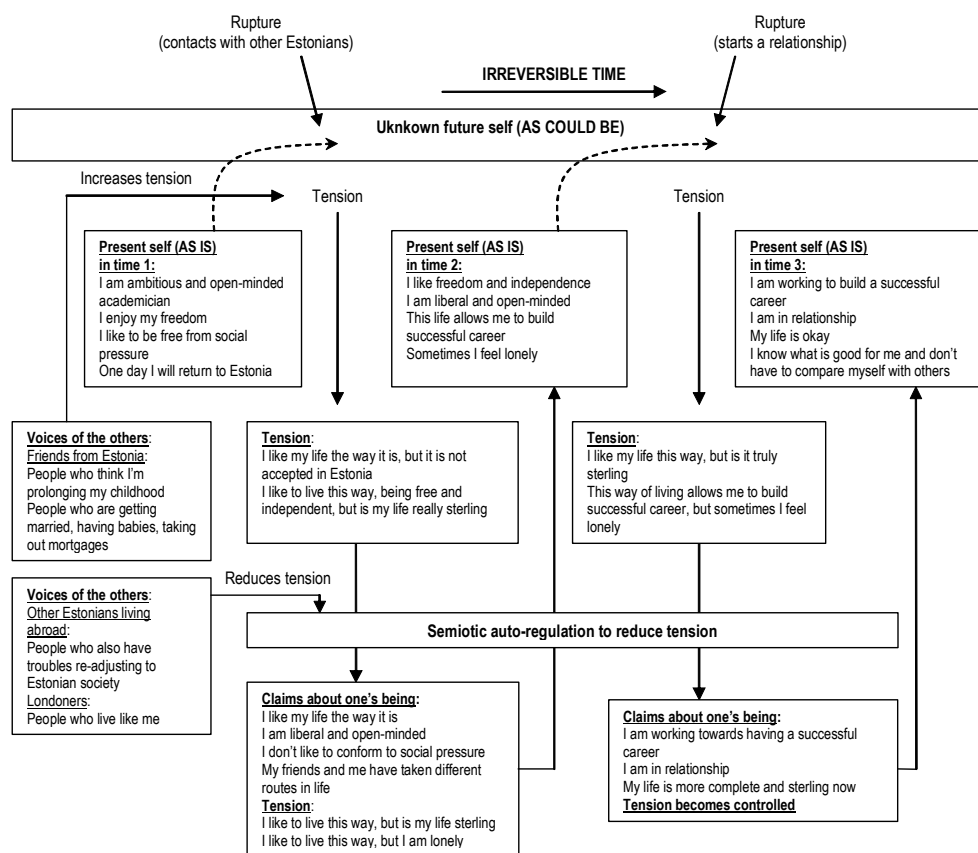


Figure 8.1.3.3 A. – Am I prolonging my childhood?

In dealing with this tension A. seems to refer to the image of himself as a liberal, open-minded and not mainstream person. He uses the idea of not being conformist and not following social pressure as positive signs, and this allows him to feel good about himself. He feels close to Londoners and other Estonians living abroad, and distances himself from his friends in Estonia: *“Those guys there are formalizing their lives fully, their responsibilities in life are changing radically etc. Instead, mine have either remained the same or have become altered to another direction. So there is less and less connection between us. Somehow we don't have common topics anymore. And perhaps I'm a bit ashamed of this difference. I feel that I'm clearly becoming estranged from my Estonian friends”* (QUEST, 02/07). All these semiotic auto-regulation efforts help to reduce the tension that comes from contacts with the Estonian other. It seems that the stable relationship A. starts helps him to deal with the inner tension and put the

questions about the value of his life behind him. A. is working towards a more responsible relationship with the world and that makes the difference between him and others less bare: *“But it has disappeared lately in the sense that I have experienced in my life, what suits me and what doesn’t. And I know what suits me and what I like. And there is no point to go on about being here or there, in the sense that I know, what I want is somewhat different. I’m not envious of people’s positions or achievements; the choices I have made have been different”* (INT3, 09/07).

8.1.3.4 I am simply a Londoner and Estonian

The move to London creates a rupture in A.’s normal way of being Estonian in many different ways. The move abroad differentiates A. from the rest of Estonians, while his plan to return to his homeland one day creates a need to maintain a connection with that country. He finds himself dealing with other Estonians’ voices that see him as an Estonian living abroad (see Figure 8.1.3.4): *“There was a discussion in the mailing list [...] Estonians in exile and refugees and who is refugee, we were all refugees... And one of my friends who also lives here in London wrote a reply to this economist saying that it is really wonderful that we have here in Europe [...] free movement of labour. As an ironic comment. Not all the Estonians have to stay in Estonia. For God’s sake! It is so good, let’s invite all the Estonians back [incomprehensible] Go to hell! We don’t have to deal with this Estonian issue all the time. You can live and just be a human being!”* (INT2, 04/07). In his attempts to deal with the tension created by this negative distinction, A. turns to a more general metasign that he uses to guide his life: *“First of all I am a human being seeking to live a rewarding life”*. He resists any attempts to contrast his way of being with being a patriot: *“There is loads of patriotism in me, but I don’t... I love my country and my people and all the good things there, but it does not mean that I have to be unreceptive towards everything else”*. He thinks of himself as a patriotic Estonian, but also as a liberal and an open-minded European. These are not contrasting self-definitions for him, but signs that can be combined and as such offer a coherent sense of self.

The second set of questions A. finds himself dealing with is related to

his being Eastern-European. Again, A. is in dialogue with the voices of the others, and again he is trying to resist their perspective: *“I do not have any Eastern-European identity. I do not think of Estonia as part of Eastern-Europe. I’m troubled when Estonia is treated like the rest of Eastern-Europe, I mean all those Slavic countries. I think, well, in reality it is, when you think about all those transition society problems and phenomena, right... Those are from some perspective for natural reasons similar to all East-European countries. But I do not see these countries essentially to have a common identity. In reality I am not able to identify myself with some Czech or Polish guy ... Well, basically, here in this context, I all the time find myself being identified, in terms of, you know... Oh Eastern-European, I have also a relative who is from Ukraine! Well, fine, so what! [...] I always find myself being at a loss, if I somehow have to here identify... identify myself as East-European... Say something about East-Europe, about other East-European countries!... Because I think, I don’t have anything to do with them”* (INT1, 09/06). The pressure from the others makes him think of himself as Eastern-European, and he is “at loss” because that category has not been part of his self-concept. He would not like to deal with this question, but finds himself being forced to take a position again and again: *“In general I don’t deal with this issue. I don’t know what to say about this... Perhaps in me I smile ironically”* (INT1, 09/06); *“You are forced to think about that [being Eastern-European]”* (INT3, 09/07). He would rather like to be seen as a Nordic person, and in his mind that is different from being Scandinavian: *“I have quite strong Scandinavian identity [...] Wait a moment... Well, okay... There is a small contradiction... Nordic, Scandinavian... I rather feel that Nordic is close to me. Scandinavia that is Sweden and Norway and Denmark, well... [pause 10 sec.] It is somewhere here, I’m rather conscious of... Damn! It is even farther... [pause 9 sec.]. I feel I am Nordic”* (INT1, 09/06, self-description exercise). However, he does admit that his resistance to accept the label of Eastern-European is also related to him feeling that it is not a positive sign: *“My girlfriend has made me feel more relaxed about this Eastern-European identity [...] At some level I was worried that she takes me as some sort of Eastern-European, well as one from that big grey East-Europe. West-Europe is separated from East-Europe, that is*

this big grey area, ugly, bruised, poor [...] That Estonia is not East-Europe, we also have a nice country and everything is very European and Nordic [...] Now I'm more relaxed [last word said in English in an interview conducted in Estonian] about that. I'm not that different, I'm okay or something like that' (INT3, 09/07). The real or imagined voices of the others have created this negative sign and the voices of the others are important dialogue partners in dealing with this possibly negative identification.

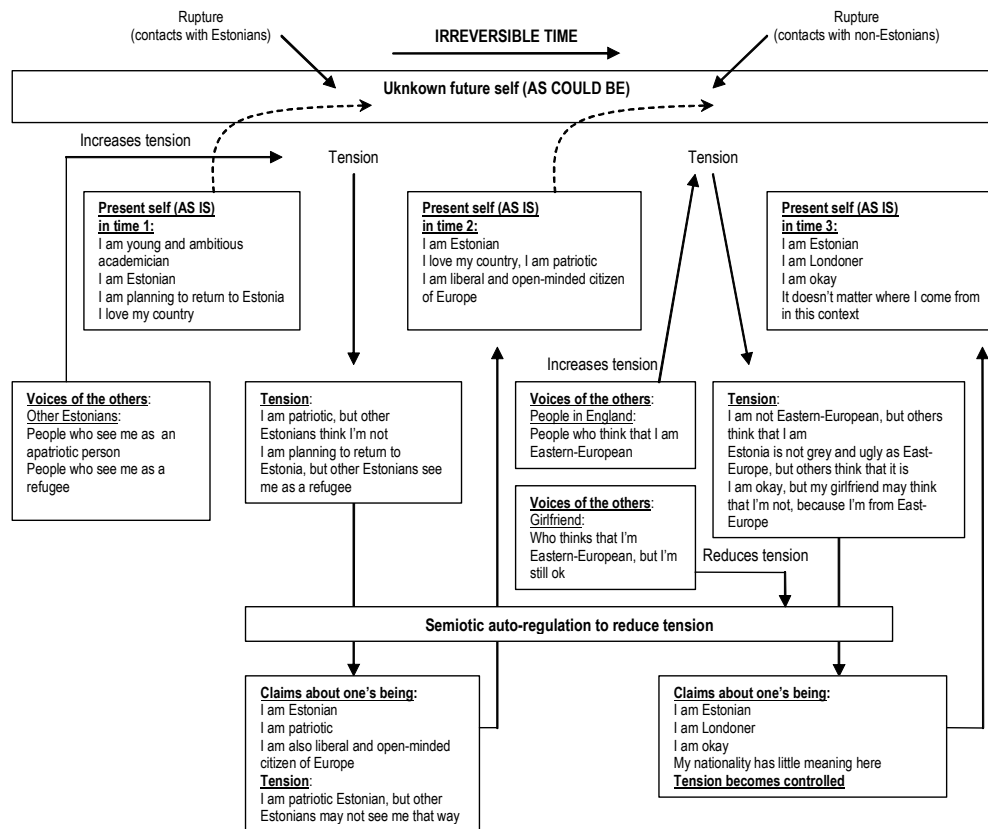


Figure 8.1.3.4 A. – I am simply a Londoner and Estonian

Nevertheless, the positive Nordic and negative Eastern-European labels seem not to be the dimensions A. would use to define himself in normal circumstances, but these gain relevance because the others pay attention to them: *“Perhaps one change that has occurred lately is that it is not anymore important where I come from [incomprehensible] or well, probably I am Estonian, that is*

more important than being Nordic”; “I think, simply this self identity has become more diffused. I think or at least at the moment I don’t feel that I need to clarify or think about myself as Nordic. I am simply a Londoner or Estonian, that for sure. This Estonian thing is still important and I am absolutely proud to be Estonian. But the Nordic and Scandinavian identity doesn’t really matter” (INT3, 09/07). Thinking of oneself as an Estonian is important, especially as A. is planning to return to his homeland one day. This sign helps to connect the past through the present with the future. However, the other categories do not play an important part in his self-definition; he does not think about being Eastern-European or Nordic in his daily functioning, where everyday experiences bring other questions to the surface of his awareness.

8.1.4 Summary

A.’s case reveals the importance of life-goal orientations as highly generalized metasigns in a person’s everyday functioning. As the study period seems to be a relatively stable period in A.’s life without any serious negative ruptures, it does not reveal any urgent problems that need to be resolved. Rather it shows how the person is trying to make sense of his life here and now in relation to the unpredictable, but anticipated and imagined future in the flow of dialogues with oneself and with others. While the life-goals that are themselves constantly constructed and re-constructed metasigns become modified due to one’s everyday experiences (e.g. finding a girlfriend), they still function as guiding principles that allow people to interpret their reactions to daily experiences in a coherent and meaningful manner.

A.’s case also reveals the importance of others’ voices in the creation of certain self-definitions and identities. A. repeatedly claims that the issue of being Eastern-European (or Nordic) has no particular meaning for him and that he does not think about himself in those categories. However, he has to deal with this question due to others’ pressure. This demonstrates that constructing identities takes place within the boundaries of a socio-cultural context in dialogue with others. People cannot just be whoever they want to be, but need to negotiate their ways of relating to the world.

8.2 The case of E.

8.2.1 Background

E. is 19 years old at the beginning of the current study. She comes from the capital city of Estonia, where she has lived for her entire life. E.'s parents are divorced and she does not have a very close relationship with her parents. Despite her young age, she used to live alone after her parents' divorce. E. sees this period of high school, when she used to study and have part-time jobs, and was almost economically independent, as a good preparation for her upcoming life in England.

E. used to attend an ordinary school, but changed to one of the most prestigious schools in Tallinn at the beginning of high school. She remembers this change as somewhat difficult, yet stimulating, because the level of teaching was higher and her new friends were very motivated and success-oriented. She graduated from high school with the silver medal, the second-highest graduation grade in Estonia. Despite the strong emphasis on precise sciences, E. decides to study arts at university.

E. starts her studies without any financial support and therefore needs to find a part-time job to earn a living while studying. She arrives in London in August 2006, a month before the school-year starts, to work and save some money.

8.2.2 Timeline analysis

The analysis reveals four main themes with related sub-themes in E.'s case that are re-occurring throughout the study period (see Table 8.2.2):

1. I want to have a stimulating life:
 - Life in Estonia is boring
 - Life in London is stimulating
 - I want a stimulating, but less stressful life
2. I need stimulation, but also security:

- Financial difficulties
 - Stress and insecurity related to work
 - New and stable life in England
3. I am in London, but my heart is in Estonia:
- Friends in Estonia
 - Boyfriend in Estonia
 - Dear people in Estonia *vs.* stimulating life in London
 - New friends in England
4. I am not Polish, I am Estonian

All these themes occur throughout the entire study period. However, the topics which refer to E.'s previous life in Estonia occur more strongly in the first half of the study period, whereas the topics related to new friends and a new stable life in London are obviously more related to the second half of the study. The repeated occurrence of the issue of ethnicity may be related to the initial focus of the current study. However, the focus on being Eastern-European or being Polish was not prompted by the intervention.

E.'s answers to the sentence completion exercise allow one to follow the fluctuations in her feelings (see Appendix E, Table E2). The initial excitement is replaced by the feelings of loneliness following her trip to Estonia in December, while the answers from the second half of the study indicate a relatively stable period when she feels more confident and secure. The answers to this exercise are also informative in relation to the topic of ethnicity. Her answers about Estonia and Estonians are very similar and consistent throughout the study period, indicating that her feelings and ideas in this area are relatively clear and not shaken by her new life-experiences. This adds support to the idea that the need to define herself in terms of ethnicity is something that is imposed on her from the outside, instead of arising from E.'s inner struggles.

Table 8.2.2 E. – Timeline analysis

	Sept. 2006 INT	Oct. 2006 QUEST	Nov. 2006 QUEST	Dec. 2006 QUEST	Jan. 2007 QUEST	Feb. 2007 QUEST	March 2007 QUEST	April 2007 INT	June 2007 (begin.) QUEST	June 2007 (end) QUEST	July 2007 QUEST	Sept. 2007 INT
I want to live a stimulating life												
Stimulating life in London	x		x		x			x				
Boring life in Estonia	x	x						x				
I need a stimulating, but less stressful life								x				x
I need stimulation, but also security												
Financial difficulties	x		x	x		x	x	x				
Insecurity and stress	x	x				x						
New and stable life in England									x	x	x	x
I am in London, but my heart is in Estonia												
Friends in Estonia						x	x	x		x		x
Boyfriend in Estonia	x					x		x				x
New friends in England	x				x	x		x	x		x	x
Dear people in Estonia vs. stimulating life in London				x			x	x				x
I am not Polish, I am Estonian	x							x				x

8.2.3 Thematic analysis

8.2.3.1 I want to live a stimulating life

Graduation from high school can be seen as a multi-furcation point in E.'s life, where she has to decide which direction to take. In making this decision E. seems to use metasigns ("Challenges motivate me", "I always need something stimulating and new") that function as an abstract life-goal orientation towards which she is striving. This life-goal orientation seems to guide her decision to go to study in London (see Figure 8.2.3.1). When trying to make sense of this choice, E. creates a contrast between her previous life in Estonia and her new life in London: *"I'm telling you, I have always felt out of place in Estonia"* (INT1, 09/06); *"There is nothing pushing me towards Estonia. Tiny. Everybody knows everybody. What I don't like about Estonia, Tallinn, is that there is nowhere to go.*

Nothing new to see” (INT1, 09/06); “*Estonia is too small to spend one’s entire life there*” (QUEST, 10/06). The life in Estonia is portrayed as boring and stagnant, whereas life in London seems initially overwhelmingly positive and inspiring: “*The hill of experiences, perhaps? I... Now it is all so ordinary, but then... For example, when the metro pulled into the station, my stomach was turning. It was something new for me. Wow everything is so interesting!. Yes. Like a child. Two-storied buses...*” (INT3, 09/07). The positive image of London that E. semiotically constructs makes her choice seem reasonable and correct.

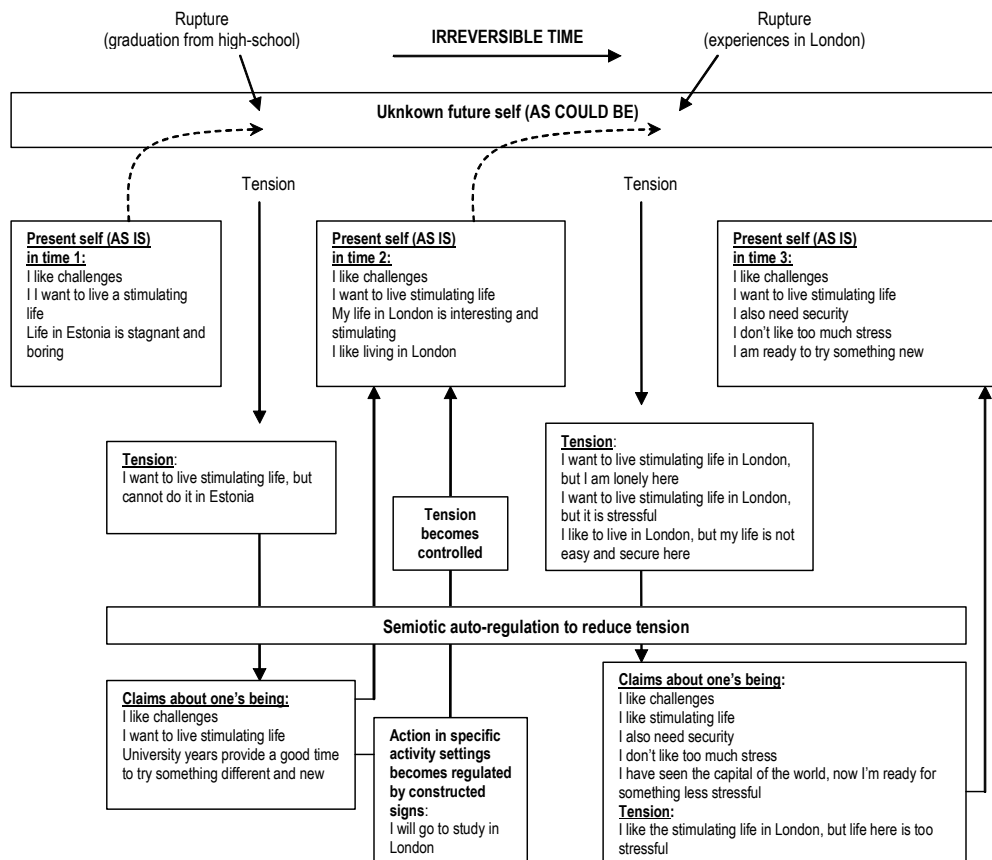


Figure 8.2.3.1 E. – I want to live a stimulating life

However, soon new experiences start to add new dimensions to this initial black-and-white contrast. The initial lack of close friends makes London an interesting, but lonely place. And there are other experiences that influence the

initial fascination about London: *“Initially the scenery was unusual for me, I liked it. Now it starts to get on my nerves. [...] I am getting tired”*; *“Sometimes London makes me angry already. Please move! I’m in a hurry! Or something like that. I’m getting tired of this city. Being always in a hurry and there is always something wrong somewhere, the trains don’t run or something”* (INT2, 04/07). The initial excitement starts to fade into the background in the light of new everyday experiences, and the initial contrast between exciting London and boring Estonia becomes less relevant in making sense of one’s being in London as still stimulating. As the new friendships in London develop it also becomes less lonely. However, it starts to become annoying: *“[If before it was interesting], exactly, then now it is annoying. Annoying. Now I sometimes think [...] right, I have seen how the capital of the world looks like, I have seen it all, now I could move to a small university town to study. It would be nice”* (INT3, 09/07). The life-goal orientation towards an interesting life is still guiding E.’s life. However, it seems that her experiences are making her appreciate also a somewhat calmer and less stressful life: *“Well, if you have everything under control, if everything is organized, then it’s nice and interesting to live in London. But me, I’m always running around and then it’s a bit too much”* (INT3, 09/07). The orientation towards an interesting life is still offering E. a sense of continuity and coherence from the past through present into the future. She has changed her idea about London, but her goals in life are the same. Hence, it allows her to make sense of herself and of the life she is living in the midst of all the new and unique everyday experiences.

8.2.3.2 I need stimulation, but also security

While the life in London is interesting and stimulating, it is also tiresome and stressful. E. has to work in order to be able to live and study in London and that causes a lot of pressure (see Figure 8.2.3.2): *“The work interferes with school and school interferes with work [...], but I can manage, because luckily, the manager helps me out and makes me a suitable duty rota. But when you work and study simultaneously, then you have to steal some extra time somewhere, and usually it comes from sleeping time. I still find time to relax, when I have a free night I go*

out with friends. I usually manage to make ends meet” (QUEST, 11/06). She changes jobs and she changes accommodation in search for something less tiresome and more affordable. She struggles to find a balance between work, studies and social life. On the one hand, her wish to live a stimulating life pushes her to spend money on social life. On the other hand, she feels guilty of not studying enough, but only working and socializing: *“Then you have more time, but you cannot enjoy yourself, because you don’t have enough money. You have to always manically calculate, thinking whether I can afford to go to the theatre or out with friends. [...] I think it’s better to work more and feel a bit freer”* (INT2, 04/07). All this causes tension, stress and insecurity: *“I’d like to feel secure. That I know exactly my schedule at work and in school. I want to have security, that I can pay all my bills”* (INT1, 09/06); *“I’d like to relax: redress, ignore others’ opinion and forget about the worries and tomorrow”* (QUEST, 10/06). She deals with this stress by clinging to her life-goal orientations of having a stimulating life, and sees the difficulties as a challenge that she has to face in order to achieve her goals. When E. finally finds a job in a bar where she fits into the company of the staff and where the managers are flexible enough to allow her to plan her work and studies properly, she feels more calm and relaxed. The following summer period, when she can concentrate on the work and earn enough money to live easily, is enjoyable, and she is positive when looking into the future: *“I have my life here that I am happy with. Things have fallen into place... I live in a nice neighbourhood; have normal job, superb co-workers, stable income, and friends here and there”* (INT3, 09/07). The tension related to the unpredictability of the future is not completely resolved and the insecurity related to finances comes back every now and then: *“At some point I was again worried that I’ll not manage to work that much, because the second year will be tougher than the first one. How will I manage money-wise? That I wouldn’t spend too much again. Because sometimes I really feel that I can’t do it anymore”* (INT3, 09/07). However, E.’s first year experiences confirm her previous self-understandings: e.g. “I am strong”, “I don’t give up easily”, “Challenges motivate me”. Her self-understanding, that she is strong enough to handle the difficulties, also becomes confirmed by others: *“Actually I had an interesting conversation last week. [...]*

He said that this innocent girl in me has disappeared. That now I am... he said there is something in me and that innocent girl has disappeared, and I am more, I stick up for myself” (INT3, 09/07). These generalized metasigns that are constructed and confirmed based on different life experiences help E. to deal with the possible future insecurities and difficulties: “My life is lately more and more secure. I know who I am, what and how I am doing” (QUEST, 06/07); “Life is good. Life is a flower” (INT3, 09/07).

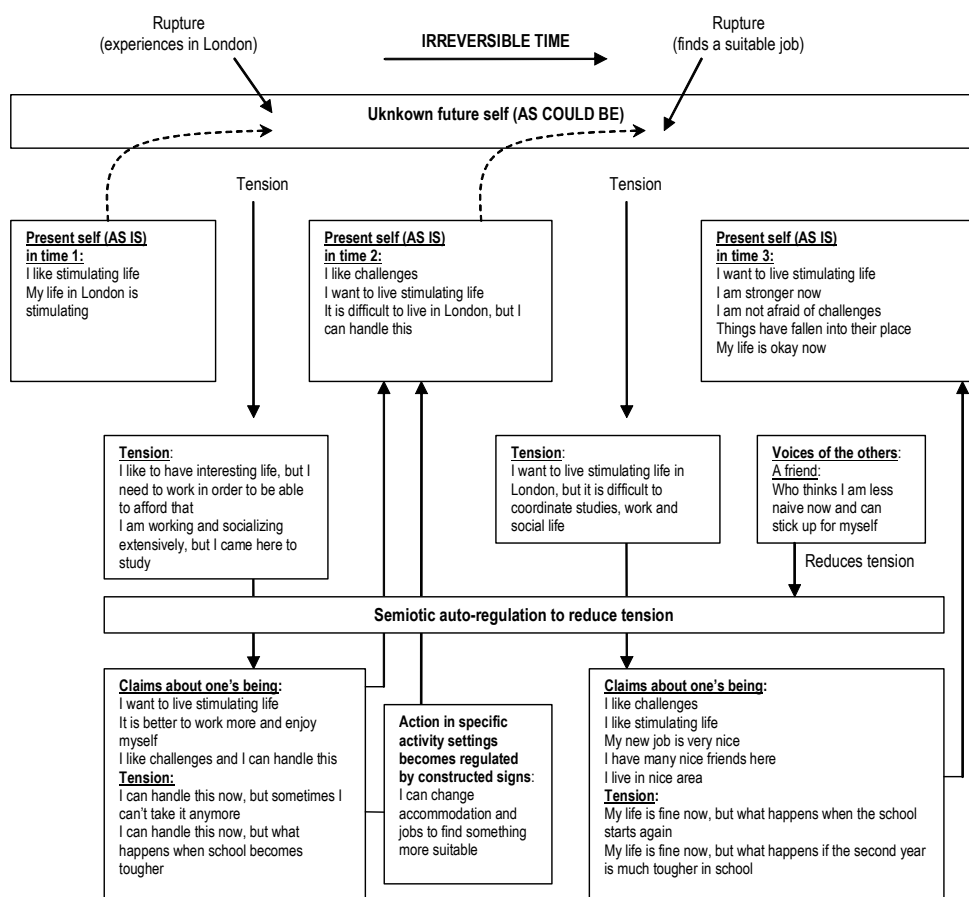


Figure 8.2.3.2 E. – I need stimulation, but also security

8.2.3.3 I am in London, but my heart is in Estonia

From the point of view of living an inspiring life, the move to London is a positive and progressive experience for E. Even if the life in London is stressful, it is in accordance with her life-goal orientation, and therefore worth continuing.

However, being in London means that E. has to be away from her friends and boyfriend in Estonia and that is difficult (see Figure 8.2.3.3): *“Sometimes I feel incomplete. And I want to feel complete here, find someone; be tied to someone somehow. Feel that somebody cares for me and looks after me”* (INT1, 09/06). Hence, London is inspiring, but she is alone there. While she manages to repress these tensions in her everyday functioning in London, her first trip back to Estonia creates a rupture and brings all those contrasting emotions to the surface of her awareness: *“Already on the first day I wanted to return to London that I’ve got so much used to. I felt awkward all the time. But at the same time it was so nice to see friends and relatives. Now I have a dilemma: I like this metropolitan life and freedom hugely, not to mention my studies, but my loved one is in Estonia. I’ve thought a lot how to change this situation. Haven’t reached a decision yet”* (QUEST, 12/06); *“When I went, I was torn, I didn’t know where I wanted to be, who I was”* (INT3, 09/07). It seems that E. is struggling to combine two different life-goal orientations (i.e. to have a stimulating life or to be loved). Both have a strong positive appeal to E. and she is not able to decide which one to use as a guiding principle in her life: *“I was crying there in Estonia, I want to go home. But then everybody asked, to what home do you want to go. And I didn’t know. It was painful to see the loved-ones, and I wanted to return. [...] Everybody cared for me and it hurt so much that I wanted to get away. That moment I thought again, that I should come back [...] back to Estonia. [...] doesn’t matter, I don’t like the life in Estonia, but these people are so important for me and I want to be with them”* (INT3, 09/07).

In regulating these fluctuating thoughts and feelings E. uses her new experiences in England. Her new friendships make her feel that the life in London may not be that lonely after all: *“When I returned I was calm. I left the emotions behind, to Estonia. I thought, okay I’m here, shall I stay or shall I go back. And on the 25th I had a lunch with friends and I came back and thought, what do I want to do. Am I... Do I want to finish the university or do I want to return there, to Estonia... I knew that at some point I would feel again the need to leave Estonia. Then I thought, okay let’s try for couple of more weeks. If it doesn’t get better, then I’ll go back. But then somehow everything, the job, I met David and*

everything went up-hill again” (INT3, 09/07). E. semiotically reconfigures this painful situation by setting a deadline (i.e. “*try for couple of more weeks*”), which enables her to control the inner tension and move further.

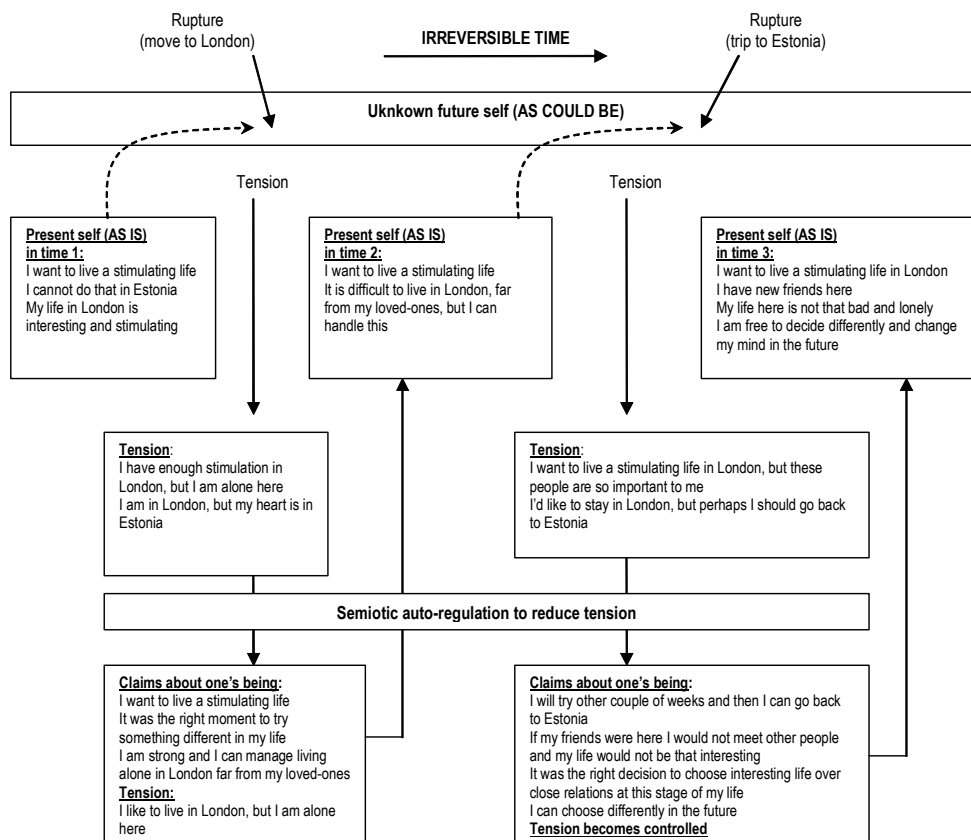


Figure 8.2.3.3 E. – I am in London, but my heart is in Estonia

As the time passes new relationships make E. feel less lonely in London. While the friends at home are still highly important, she starts to reconsider these relationships in the light of her new experiences: “*Friends there are still so important. I would have liked to pack them and take them with me. I think, if they were here, everything would be perfect. Perfect... but then I’d know that I’d stay only with them and wouldn’t meet anybody else*” (INT2, 04/07). She still misses her friends from home, but regulates this inner tension by referring to the negative possible outcome of not making new friends in London (i.e. not

having an interesting life).

The same kind of dynamics of feeling lost and lonely in London and repressing these tensions by new life-experiences and general life-goal orientations is also evident in E.'s relationship with her boyfriend: "*When couple of weeks passes then I feel more secure again. I know I've got used to being alone again and then I am, as he says, bulletproof*" (INT1, 09/06). Over time her relationship with her boyfriend starts to change and she is prepared to accept it: "*I don't know, if it goes like that, let it be. I don't want to return and he cannot come here. Inevitably I'm here, well I don't know what I'll do after graduation [...] inevitably we move on with our lives sooner or later, it cannot go on like this*" (INT2, 04/07). In dealing with this change, E. is once again referring to her wish to have a stimulating and successful life: "*Simply in the stage of my life, when I had just graduated from high school [...] then I thought it will not last anyway and later I will regret to have lost such an opportunity, the university will not disappear [...] in this respect at that stage of my life it was the right decision*" (INT2, 04/07). However, if that metasign helps her to make sense of her previous decisions, she still seems to be fluctuating between this life-goal orientation and the one related to close relationships when it comes to possible future choices: "*I wouldn't do it again. If in three years time I face a decision whether to go to study somewhere and leave somebody [...] I wouldn't do it again. It hurts too-too-too much [pause]. But we'll see. If I'd had something really important, I'd be prepared to go back to Estonia if it really works so well, then I can go back*" (INT2, 04/07). It seems that E. is trying to find a balance between those two life-goal orientations and combine them in a meaningful way. She has made peace with her choices in the past and is looking into the future. It seems that she is trying to construct a new metasign where her newly created ideas about herself as a self-focused person, the wish to live an interesting life, but to be loved at the same time, are all combined.

8.2.3.4 I am not Polish, I am Estonian

The new life experiences in London seem to bring the topic of ethnicity into E.'s awareness. Her experiences from home prepare her for reacting in the situations

when she is considered to be Russian: *“Quite many say, aaa, you are Estonian, so you are Russian. Then I get a bit upset. Not that I have anything against Russians, but you just don’t put these two together like that. Estonians and Russians together, oh you all speak Russian, they don’t know and then they say like this”* (INT1, 09/06). However, E.’s experiences in London make her aware of another ethnic group from whom she needs to differentiate herself (see Figure 8.2.3.4): *“They have not such a bad opinion about Estonians, when I work then they ask, “You are Polish, right?”. Then I say, “No I’m not Polish, I’m Estonian”. Then they are slightly smiling, “Oh at least you are not Polish”. They are so tired of Polish who come here to work”* (INT2, 04/07). She sympathizes with Polish workers and feels that they don’t deserve to be treated with hostility. However, she still finds it necessary to make sure that people know she is not from Poland, but from Estonia: *“I’m proud to be Estonian. In the sense that Estonians are decent and honest people, well not all of them, but most of them are nice”* (INT3, 09/07).

Another distinction based on ethno-cultural heritage appears in her mind due to her new experiences: *“Well, Eastern-European comes from them saying like that. I, of course, consider myself more Nordic than Eastern-European. But for them, they say from the east, so I’ve got used to it [...] I think I rather consider myself to be European. Now it has become more precise, that from the east, blonde and with an accent”* (INT1, 09/06). It seems that before moving to London E. did not have a concept of herself as Eastern-European, but her experiences and the external pressure make her think about herself in those terms. However, soon she starts to resist this pressure from the others: *“I don’t know they always start to talk about geography. I don’t know. It’s tiresome. Sometimes I think, can’t we talk about something else, weather for example [...] I don’t like this topic. To talk and explain how is life in Estonia. Sometimes people ask, what kind of life do you have there in Estonia. Normal life! I can’t point to any differences between here and there. It’s just that there are so few of us and Estonia is so tiny”* (INT2, 04/07). It seems that the issue of ethnicity is not important for E. She does not seem to think about that in her everyday functioning; it is not something that she constantly uses to define herself. In other

circumstances, E.'s random experiences of being considered Eastern-European or Polish would fade into the background. However, being constantly faced with a need to define herself in relation to those categories, she finds this pressure uncomfortable, annoying and disturbing for her everyday functioning.

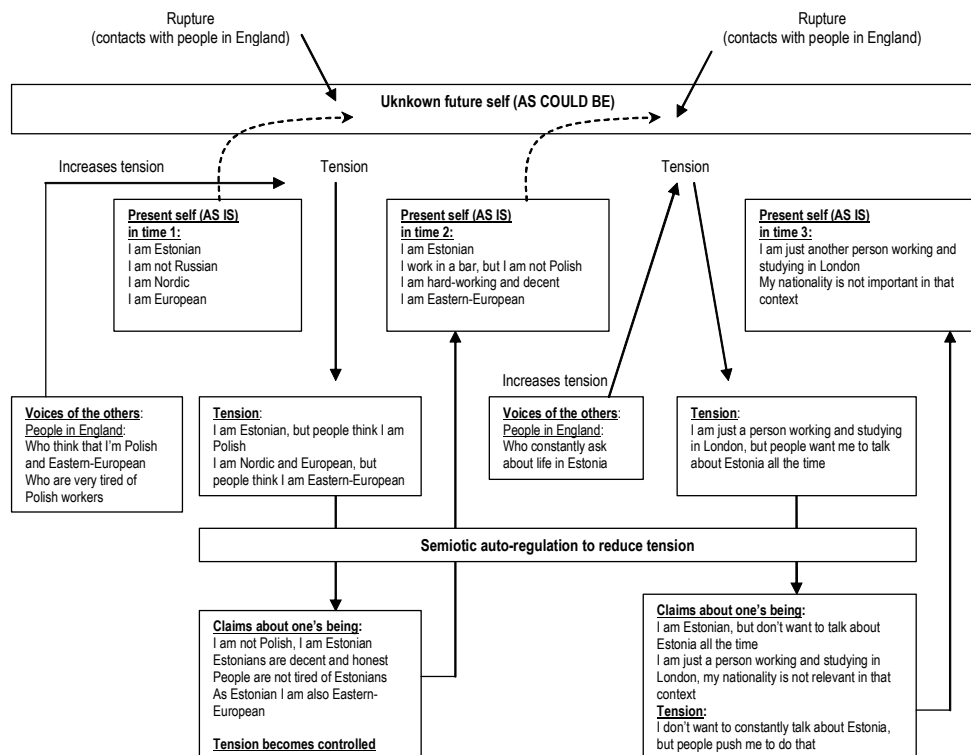


Figure 8.2.3.4 E. – I am not Polish, I am Estonian

8.2.4 Summary

E.'s case points to the need to consider the concept of rupture in its different forms. The move to England is perceived as a sudden, but positive rupture in E.'s life. It is something she is looking forward to. A strong negative rupture is evident in the case of close relationships, where being away, together and then away again from loved-ones, creates emotional turmoil. Otherwise, the move to England brings along many new life-experiences due to which E. starts to reconsider her being within and in relation to the surrounding world, but it is a relatively gradual and steady process of finding again a functional relationship with the world.

E.'s case is interesting also for examining the effect that others' pressure can have on a person's self-definition. The question of ethnicity seems not to be an important feature in E.'s self-concept. However, in the new context, she finds herself being pushed to considering herself in new ways (e.g. being Eastern-European or being Polish). While E. seems to resist those external pressures, her case shows that potentially the demands from others can have an escalating effect in forcing people to think about themselves in certain ways and claiming identities that they would not otherwise have claimed.

8.3 The case of H.

8.3.1 Background

At the outset of the current study, H. is 23 years old. She was born in a small town in Estonia, but has lived most of her life in Tallinn. This is where she went to high-school and started her university studies. She lives alone with her mother and has never lived away from home. At the beginning of the study H. is starting the final year of her Master's programme in the field of social sciences. She moves to the UK, to one of the cities in the Midlands to start her half-year exchange student life in August 2006. She had never been to the UK prior to her arrival.

8.3.2 Timeline analysis

The analysis reveals five main themes with related sub-themes in H.'s case that are re-occurring throughout the study period (see Table 8.3.2). These themes are:

1. From fake to real life and back:
 - My real life is in Estonia, England is fake and temporary
 - There are more opportunities in England
 - My real life was in England, life in Estonia is fake
 - New life in old context – re-adaptation to Estonia
2. I was a better person in England
3. Where are my true friends?

- Positive feelings about Estonian friends
 - Positive feelings about friends from England
 - I have good friends here and there
4. He makes me happy, so I want to try
 5. What should I do in the future?

The themes that occur during the study period are related to H.'s initial adaptation to the life in England, but most importantly to her later re-adjustment to the Estonian context. H.'s initial reactions to the return to Estonia are very strong and negative. The transition period after this rupture is characterized by active self-search efforts and fluctuating emotions between depression, apathy and hope. The fluctuations in H.'s feelings during that period are evident from the answers to the sentence completion exercise (see Appendix E, Table E3). However, timeline analysis shows that when H. finally finds some balance inside herself and in relation to the new/old socio-cultural context, other themes become important in her life, especially questions about the future. As these become resolved in June, by her finding out that she can start the voluntary work in Sweden starting from August, this theme fades again into the background.

The sentence completion exercise reveals how H.'s opinions about Estonia and Estonians fluctuate in relation to her life events (see Appendix E, Table E3). While England becomes and remains for her an idealized place where she could live her life the way she wanted, the feelings towards her homeland and compatriots change over time. On the one hand, the answers to the sentence completion exercise reveal the dynamics from nostalgic and positive views of Estonia and Estonians in England, through negative attitudes towards home, to the final stabilization in those evaluations. On the other hand, H.'s answers are never purely positive or negative, but mixed, possibly referring to a situation where meanings are in chaos and where the person is actively trying to make sense of her experiences.

Table 8.3.2 H. – Timeline analysis

	Aug. 2006 INT	Oct. 2006 QUEST	Nov. 2006 QUEST	Dec. 2006 QUEST	Jan. 2007 INT	Jan. 2007 (end) QUEST	Feb. 2007 QUEST	March 2007 QUEST	April 2007 QUEST	May 2007 QUEST	June 2007 QUEST	July 2007 QUEST	July (end) 2007 INT
From fake to real life and back													
Estonia is real life, England is fake and temporary		x		x									
Estonia is fake, England is my real life		x	x	x	x			x					x
There are more opportunities in England	x		x		x								x
New life in old context					x	x	x	x	x				x
Where are my true friends?													
Positive feelings about Estonian friends			x					x				x	
Positive feelings about friends from England							x			x	x		
Both are good friends					x				x				x
I was a better person in England				x	x		x						x
He makes me happy, so I want to try			x		x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
What should I do in the future?								x	x		x		

8.3.3 Thematic analysis

8.3.3.1 From fake to real life and back

Moving to England as an exchange student is an important rupture in H.'s life that creates a divide between life as it used to be and life as it will be. While she enjoys being in England – socializing, partying, doing sports, studying – she also experiences home-sickness during her first months abroad. H.'s inner tensions in relation to these new experiences become externalized in her talk about 'real' and 'fake' life (see Figure 8.3.3.1): *"I think it [Estonian evening she organized] was important because probably for the first time I felt really good and homelike here. [...] As if I was together with my real fiends, not just new and strange people"* (QUEST, 10/06). She refers to Estonia and the life there as the 'real thing', while being in England is initially a temporary and 'fake' period: *"I don't feel terribly homesick anymore. It seems that I got used to the idea of being here. [...] In some moments I felt that everything here was fake because at some point I had to return to my real life. But now I rather think that this is the life I have designed and I can*

continue it also later. It is the life I want to live and I enjoy fully. And it is true that I couldn't live this life in Estonia, but I have all the possibilities to do it here" (QUEST, 10/06); *"The life here in England has become the 'real life' during the last month. It is not anymore simply a temporary phase"* (QUEST, 11/06). Hence, the situation has turned. The opportunities that H. finds in England in terms of studying, but also in relation to extra-curricular activities, and the relations she builds make that life interesting and satisfying: *"In Estonia you have no opportunities, no choices. Rather you can do the things that are offered, not to choose yourself"* (QUEST, 11/06). The life in England becomes the 'real life' that is desirable, but probably not possible in Estonia. New generalized metasigns become created: "This is the way I want to live" and "I can live in this way in England". These metasigns are interconnected and have a highly positive value for H.

H.'s feelings and thoughts in relation to her homeland fluctuate during this initial period when 'the fake and temporary life' is turned into the 'real thing'. On the one hand, she experiences increased affinity with the homeland: *"I feel that I value my small country much more and I want my friends to know where I come from. I've started to appreciate my heritage much more and through that learned a lot about my origins. [...] My togetherness with my homeland is much stronger than before"* (QUEST, 12/06). The gaze of the other feeds into H.'s sense of being from Estonia. The questions about her origins that were not relevant before suddenly become important. On the other hand, she says: *"I do appreciate Estonia more, but still I don't want to live there ☺"* (QUEST, 11/06). Her feelings are ambiguous. She is away from home, among people who are ignorant about her homeland, so she needs to explain and sometimes also justify her Estonian heritage. This feeds into creating a somewhat idealized view of the homeland. At the same time, the perceived impossibility to continue living the 'real life' makes the return to Estonia undesirable. Furthermore, H.'s answers show a tendency to idealize the place that is further away; when she is in England, she emphasizes her newly-found strong affinity with homeland, when she is in Estonia, she is longing for England: *"Now when I was at home during Christmas, I had to go out in Helsinki, in the airport, it was snowing and it was so cold, my*

toes were freezing. And the moment I got back here [to England] it was so nice and warm again, so the temperature here is good for me” (INT2, 01/07). She is in-between – not anymore fully in Estonia and at the same time almost leaving England, and this creates tension: “I don’t want to go back [laughing]. And it is difficult to explain to the people at home, my friends are waiting for me and my mother is so happy, keeps telling me what we will do when I’m back... And I just think, I really don’t want to go. I feel absolutely no need or desire to go back” (INT2, 01/07).

The return to Estonia is a serious and negative rupture in H’s way of being: *“The first days at home were even more difficult. Home seemed to be a completely unfamiliar place, I didn’t have any desire to meet anybody or to see my Estonian friends. Instead, I felt that I was in a strange place among strangers who were not able to understand me or my feelings” (QUEST, 01/07); “Returning, so to say, home, to Estonia, I felt as a stranger here. I didn’t know where things were in my home, I couldn’t sleep at night, because I missed my friends from England. I even missed my bed in England” (QUEST, 01/07). The first month at home is a period of adaptation accompanied by feelings of apathy, frustration and sadness: “During the last month I’ve been trying to adapt to my life here, cope with being in Estonia. Somehow I still feel that this isn’t my life or that I’m not able to live it anymore the way I used to (before leaving). I still feel that I moved on with my life while living in England. And coming back and staying here is like a step back in my life. A very difficult step. [...] I feel emotionless here, nothing is important enough. There is nothing I’m looking forward to or wish to do. [...] I feel that I’ve changed so much and I don’t want to go back where I started. [...] Sometimes I even feel as if I have returned to hell. I don’t feel as if I’m at home. I miss the people and the things we used to do, and the life we used to live. And I feel helpless here. Sometimes it’s easier. But I’ve understood that there is nothing keeping me here. And after graduation I’d like to go and live somewhere else” (QUEST, 02/07).*

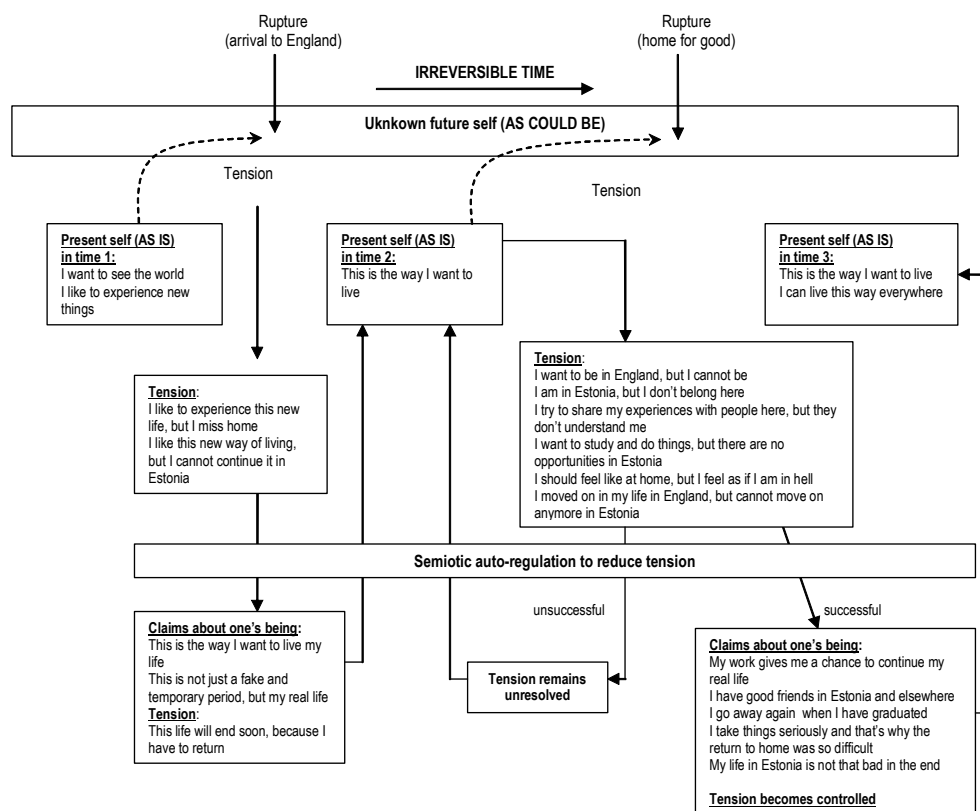


Figure 8.3.3.1 H. – From fake to real life and back

H. goes through the same struggles as when she first moved to England, only this time the tension is stronger. Her newly created sense of identity (“This is the kind of life I want to live”) to which she is devoted to is tied to the English context (“I can live this way only in England”) and therefore does not fit into the changed socio-cultural context. The connection between those two generalized metasigns is too strong and it takes time and efforts to break that link. The tension is carried forward unresolved and that keeps H. from moving on to a new, transformed state of being. This struggle feeds into H.’s negative feelings towards the Estonian collective culture: while in December 2006 Estonia was “*a rapidly developing and changing country, my home*”, then in February 2007 it is “*a cold, grey, socially repressed country*” (see Appendix E). In the midst of this continuing tension, H. clings to the aspects in her life that are still compatible with her newly-created self-understandings. She claims to feel fine when working on

her Master's Thesis or when talking to her friends from England. These are the moments when she can still live her life the way she wants despite a different context. H. seems to go through an 'all-or-nothing' stage in getting into the way of new collective culture again; she wants to hold on to her new self-understandings and apply them to the new life situation unmodified.

H.'s inner turmoil starts to finally cool down in March/April: *"In general I feel much better now. I feel the happiest for the fact that I feel like doing things again, meeting my friends and being with them. [...] There are still days that are difficult, but in general it is better"; "I suppose I've more or less got used to the life at home again and I see again positive things around me. I'm also trying to live my life the way I learned to do that in another environment. I value myself more and also people who take me the way I am. [...] There are so many things I want to do in my life. To feel good, especially when I am just on my own"* (QUEST, 03/07). H. starts to transform the metasign complex. Her studies seem to offer her an opportunity to live according to her new identity. She starts to go out with her friends again, being content *"that I have so nice people in my life, both in Estonia and elsewhere in the world"* (QUEST, 03/07). The emergence of H.'s thoughts about a future career in that period also signifies the move out from the tension-filled present state into a new being in the future (see Table 8.3.2). Looking back to her experiences many months later she says: *"It was truly difficult. But of course, I'm also this kind of person who takes things very seriously. I suppose someone else would not have experienced it in this way"* (INT3, 08/07). Creating a semiotic regulator ("I am a person, who takes things seriously") allows seeing the turmoil of the past being related in a meaningful way to the person who she is now. It allows creating a sense of sameness and continuity beyond a serious rupture that initially made one's desired life impossible. Together with a transformed metasign complex ("This is the way I want to live my life", "I can live my life this way also in Estonia"), it creates a basis for H. to move on to the next moment as a coherent and unified person.

8.3.3.2 I was a better person in England

The rupture in H.'s everyday experiences that is brought along by the movement

to a new socio-cultural context makes her rethink not only her ideas about her life (i.e. How should my life be?), but it creates also a need to think about oneself in relation to this new life (i.e. What kind of person should I be?). H. feels that she is living a different life and in that life she is a different person (see Figure 8.3.3.2): *“I feel that in Estonia I’m very different kind of person and live very different kind of life. And it’s very difficult to combine the two of them – in Estonia nobody knows what I’ve experienced, what I’ve done, how I’ve lived. [...] There I’m still the person who I was before leaving. Here, instead, I am who I want to be. Probably it’s difficult to understand, but I mean that coming here, I had a choice what to do, where to go, with whom to be, how to live. The choices are much more restricted in Estonia”* (QUEST, 12/06). Importantly, the new kind of being has a positive connotation: *“I feel that I’m a bit better person here compared to who I was in Estonia”* (QUEST, 12/06); *“It is not about my personality, but rather it is what I do here, that makes me feel that I am a better person here”* (INT2, 01/07); *“I think being there made me much better and more integrated person. For example it changed my values quite a bit”* (QUEST, 02/07). The new way of being is about the activities, the people, the independence, but also about new values (e.g. to eat healthy food, not to drink alcohol, to respect nature). Hence, the metasign complex “This is the way I want to live” and “This is the place I want to live” has another component: “This is the person who I want to be”.

Expectedly, the return to Estonia creates a serious rupture in this newly-found *status quo* in H.’s self-understandings. She struggles to make this new identity functional also in a new time and space context. She feels that the context constrains her: *“When you go to live in a new place, then you are kind of a blank page, there you can develop and be exactly the way you want to be. You can create a picture of yourself and you like that new picture. And then you go back and you have to be who you were before. And it’s so difficult to stay who you have become, because all the people are different and they see you the way you used to be. Perhaps, I don’t know, it’s difficult to explain, but this is the way I felt. I moved on and then I had to move back to be able to be here [...] It’s not that I moved back. Perhaps initially I felt that way. But now I think it’s like a stable line, but I haven’t moved forward”* (INT3, 08/07). H. experiences the need to adapt to a

new collective culture in a similar manner as when moving to England. In the past she needed to change her meaning space in order to fit in, and faces the same challenge once again. However, the re-adaptation is more tension-laden, because the newly created identity has a very positive connotation and it is difficult to let go of it or even modify it. It functions as a highly abstract vision of oneself and one's life that guides the movement from the present to the future.

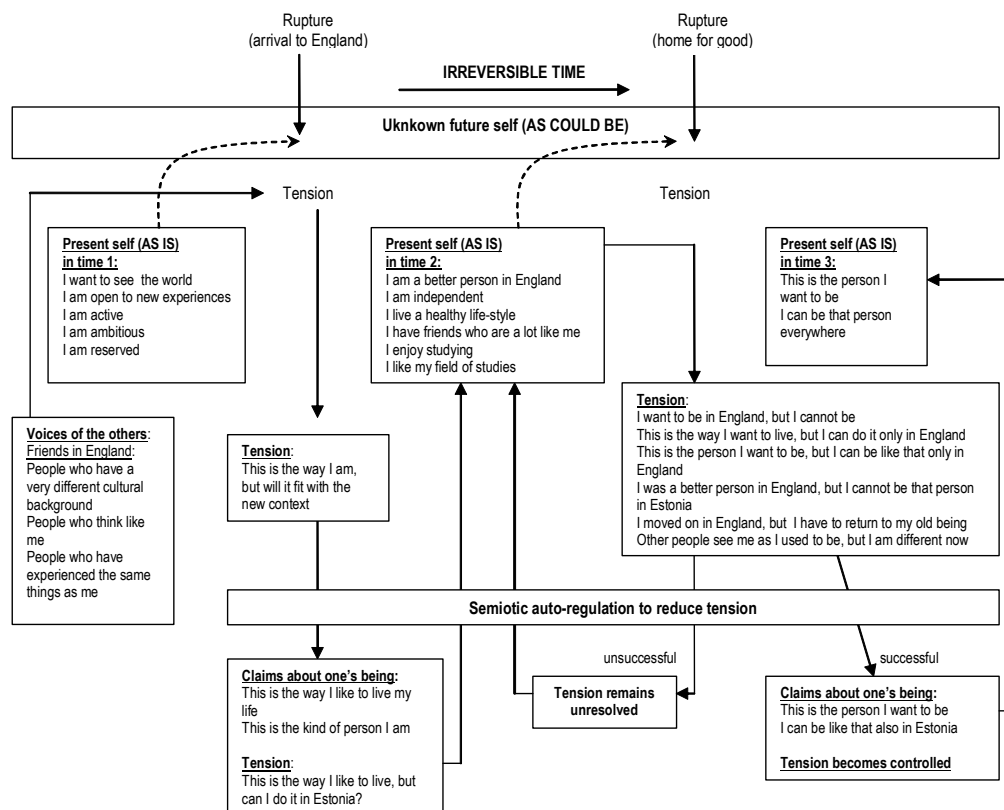


Figure 8.3.3.2 H. – I was a better person in England

Hence, the re-adjustment to an Estonian context requires breaking down the existing metasign complex and redefining the interrelationships between metasigns to make the complex functional again. The link between the signs “This is the person who I want to be” and “England is the place I want to be” becomes redefined and weakened in the light of new life experiences (e.g. “I can be a better person also elsewhere”). H. says: “*I feel that I respect myself more. It is difficult to*

explain, but I don't feel anymore this feeling of obligation in relation to others and I think it's been important for me. Before going to England I was afraid of all the things that could happen or go wrong if I don't do something. [...] Now I'm more courageous not to play the role others impose on me, but to be myself. Before leaving I was always searching for love, to have someone to be with. Now it's not the most important thing for me. I want to do so many other things in my life and feel good about it. Especially feel good also when I'm on my own. [...] I feel like a better person and I hope these values will not disappear" (QUEST, 03/07). The transformation of the metasign complex enables H. to function effectively in different contexts; the definition of oneself through the opposition between places (e.g. "I am this in England, but I cannot be that in Estonia") loses its relevance and becomes replaced by a self-definition through activities and values that one prioritizes (e.g. "I want to be this kind of person irrespective of the place"): *"Pushing forward, I think it was more important to me when I went to England. Career and school and work. But now it is not like that, I rather feel that I want to do something and feel happy doing it. It is not anymore that I am pushing towards something"* (INT3, 08/07).

8.3.3.3 Where are my true friends?

The topic of friendship is another important arena where H.'s inner identity construction struggles after a rupture become evident. Initially H.'s 'true friends' are in Estonia. On the one hand, the contacts with Estonian friends help to regulate the tension that accompanies the adaptation; talking to them is a link to the known past that creates a sense of stability and security also in the present that is moving towards the unpredictable future. On the other hand, these contacts also create tension by making H. home-sick (see Figure 8.3.3.3): *"I feel that they [friends from Estonia] are the closest friends I have. Initially it was more difficult, because contacts with them made me home-sick. Now it is simply very good to know that many people are waiting for me to come to Estonia, and have not forgotten me"* (QUEST, 11/06). However, as time goes by, the friends H. finds in England become more important: *"I couldn't say anymore, as I did in the first month, that my friends here will never be as close to me as my friends back at*

home. [...]Now I think that they are both very good friends, no difference between my friends here or at home” (QUEST, 11/06). As H.’s image of herself and of her new way of living becomes ever clearer, so become the relationships with people with whom she shares those new experiences more and more important.

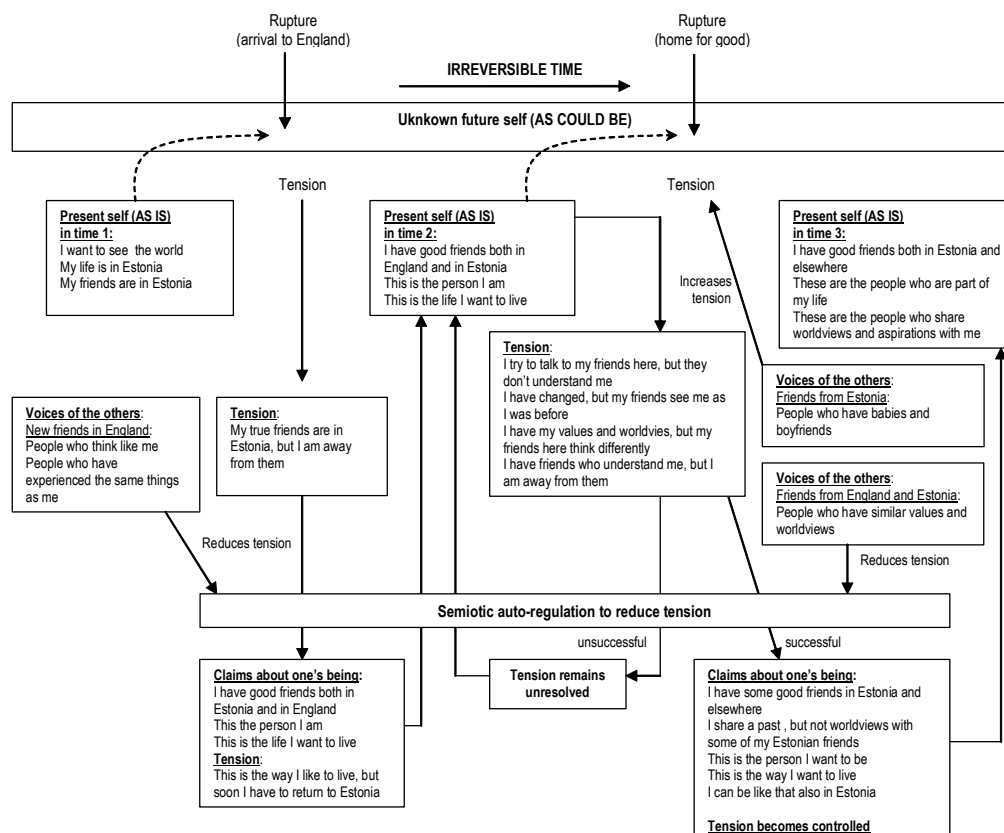


Figure 8.3.3.3 H. – Where are my true friends?

The return to Estonia creates a rupture in H.’s transformed way of being. During the following transition period the place and people related to that new/old collective culture acquire a negative connotation. She feels that her ‘real friends’ are the ones who she met in England and ‘old’ Estonian friends are not able to understand her: *“I feel that many of my relationships here are broken and I have been trying for many years to repair them. I feel that most of the people in Estonia are spiritually broken, their principles and values are very different [from mine]”* (QUEST, 02/07). The negativity is not related only to specific people, but

generalized to the overall judgement “Most Estonians are spiritually broken”. At the same time the friends from England are pictured in a positive light: *“I don’t feel that I need anybody here [...] My friends from England are still very important to me [...] It’s so much easier to talk to them, because they are experiencing the same feelings. [...] It’s so easy to talk to them, but so difficult to open up to people here”* (QUEST, 02/07). The same process of regulating inner tension through dialogue with others appears. However, this time around the contacts with friends from England help to regulate the tension that stems from the re-adaptation. Similarly to the first identity construction cycle, these contacts reduce and create tension simultaneously. By emphasizing the difference between now and then they create nostalgia about the past, which simultaneously reduces and increases tension.

As H. settles into the new/old collective culture and finds a way how to live her new life in that context, her relationships with friends from home and from abroad stabilize: *“At some point I realized that I have very nice and good friends also here, that everything is okay, nobody is that bad”* (INT3, 08/07). She redefines some of the friendships in Estonia: *“My relations with friends from home are so and so. There are some people with who it is easy to talk and share my thoughts and ask for advice. At the same time there are others with who I have often different opinions. I still feel that I expect more from my Estonian friends than they are willing or able to give”* (QUEST, 06/07). Hence, she creates two groups of friends: friends from England and those Estonian friends with whom it is easy to talk, and other Estonian friends. The voices of those two groups remain to be somewhat antagonistic in H.’s inner dialogues. The voices of the friends in Estonia represent the opposition through which H. defines herself, whereas the friends from England (and some friends from Estonia) represent a voice that strengthens H.’s way of being through similarity: *“I felt that we think in the same way, that we have similar goals in life, exactly these girls also felt that they want to travel and see the world and experience different things and so on. [...] Here my friends are, everybody is already living in co-habitation and are having children and in this respect have a very different life. I tell them that I’m going to Sweden and they ask: Why? What is wrong here? You should start to think about*

children and should find yourself somebody and should move in with somebody. Perhaps this is the reason you feel bad here, that you're living alone, like, without a man. So it's like, different worldviews perhaps. So sometimes it's difficult. I love my friends very much and everything, but to meet them and then everybody is with their boyfriends and talk about baby stuff. So it's different" (INT3, 08/07). As the friends from England give positive feedback to H.'s new way of living and new way of seeing herself, they are seen as positive characters in this dialogical engagement. While both of these voices are related to different significant periods in H.'s life (i.e. childhood friends and friends from England), only one of them has relevance for the future.

8.3.3.4 He makes me happy, so I want to try

Among other important personal experiences, H. finds in England a person who she falls in love with. However, the desire to build a relationship, to love and be loved, collides with the reality of her return to home in a couple of months' time (see Figure 8.3.3.4): *"In this respect, I think, we both had a huge inner conflict at some point. If and how and what... [...] Like, will it work, what will happen if we both go away [...] It is quite difficult, if you know constantly, that I will go home and even if we will meet again, who knows when"* (INT2, 01/07). Others' opinions and experiences with long-distance relationships feed into H.'s hesitation: *"No, in Estonia I don't know anybody who has been like this. I know that the relationships that people have had in this way, have ended"* (INT2, 01/07). Despite the initial hesitations, they decide to give this relationship a chance and this brings joy and happiness to H.'s life: *"Now I feel very good here [in England]. [...] By now the situation has changed, I don't want to go back home anymore. Certainly this is related to my relationship here that is making me very happy and due to which I have no desire to go anywhere. When I'm next to him I feel very happy, as if I'm at home"* (QUEST, 11/07). But the happiness of being together does not eliminate the tension about returning to Estonia and being apart. In her attempts to deal with this inner tension, H. turns to other people's experiences about long-distance relationships: *"When we went to Nottingham, there was a barman in one of the cafes, who was originally from Chile. And somehow we started talking and he told*

us that he had a girlfriend from Bulgaria [...]. And how they meet every two months and have been together for many years already and how the girl will soon come to live in England. And how initially the girl did not speak any English and the guy taught her. When people tell these kinds of positive things, then it feels like our situation is very simple. That it is not too bad. [Laughing] We can at least talk to each other” (INT2, 01/07). Amidst the reality of the return, others’ encouragements and her own experience with the relationship, she tries to find the inner balance and commits herself to this relationship.

However, the temporary balance H. had created in England becomes seriously disrupted upon her return to Estonia, when the boyfriend ends their relationship. This is a sudden and unexpected rupture in H.’s life. She is still emotionally attached to him, does not understand the reasons for him ending the relationship, would like to discuss these, but at the same time feels that she cannot change anything because he has made up his mind: *“We continued to communicate intensively for a month, but then I ended these relations. For me it was difficult to be, so to say, friends, because I somehow still hoped that things would work out between us. I tried to be there for him, support him. At the same time I felt so bad inside. I think I’ve had all the possible feelings towards him in the last month. [...] But whatever I feel or think will not change the situation. [...] I cannot do anything. In some moments I even think that it is better this way. Rationally. But I feel it’s very difficult. [...] I miss him a lot and wish I could change something. The only thing that keeps me going is the fact that it is better for him this way. That he wanted it to be this way. But it’s very difficult” (QUEST, 02/07).* The tension related to the break-up also has an impact on H.’s re-adaptation to the life in Estonia: *“Now I feel that it [the break-up] made it much easier for me to be at home again. [...] At the moment I’m trying not to remember that I ever was in England. Not the friends that I found there, but everything else that can remind me of the time that I spent there. So it’s good that I’m at home, where I have no memories related to him” (QUEST, 01/07).* But even if the place does not remind her of him, the memories are still there, causing anxiety and tension. The rupture is intense and unexpected and the transition period to a new *status quo* takes time. The fluctuations in H.’s feelings are still evident after

several months: “My feelings are still jumping from one extreme to another, but I think many people experience this. Some days are more difficult, some days I miss my ex-boyfriend terribly. We talk to each other sometimes, but I don’t even know if it makes the situation better or worse. It is probably difficult because I still have feelings for him, but I cannot change anything” (QUEST, 04/07).

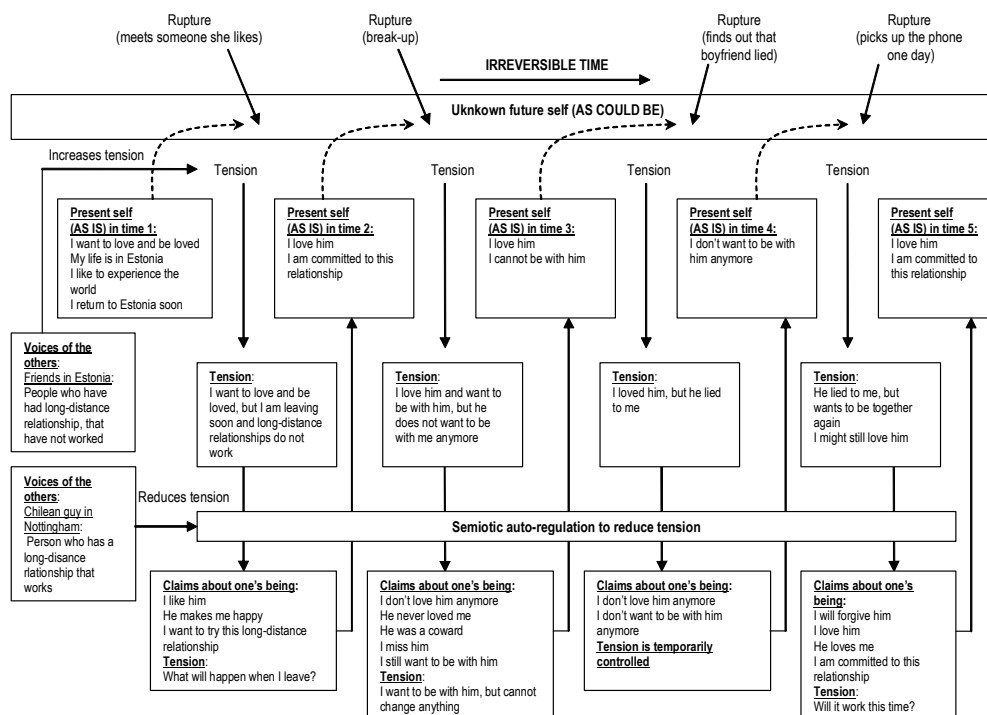


Figure 8.3.3.4 H. – He makes me happy, so I want to try

The summer brings along another serious rupture in H.’s relationship, when she learns new and painful things about her ex-boyfriend. She tries to deal with this re-emerged tension by rationalizing the situation: “I’d have never thought that something like that could happen or that I could be so blind about somebody. At the same time, now it’s much easier, because I’m not sad about our break-up anymore. Rather I feel better now, because everything is clear and has found its solution. Somehow it seems easier now to continue and be happy, because I’m not anymore sad about the things I missed” (QUEST, 06/07). This temporarily felt state of balance becomes again disrupted by H.’s everyday

experiences: *“The most surprising were my own feelings... I was so sure I had got over the feelings for [him] [...]. And then, suddenly all my feelings were back and I answered his call and we talked the whole night about what present and past. After that the things have turned out the way I would have never imagined”* (QUEST, 07/07). At the end of the study H. is once again involved in a long-distance relationship. While the tensions about the future are once again present in her reflections, the level of those inner discussions seems to be qualitatively different: *“After that things have been different between us. [...] I think perhaps this year of being apart is good [year when H. is doing voluntary work in Sweden]. We can see, or I can see, how serious he is”* (INT3, 08/07).

8.3.4 Summary

H.’s case is unique among the cases in the current study, as it allows seeing the real back-and-forth movement between different collective cultures. In her journey from Estonia to England and back H. goes through the cycle of identity construction twice: first she needs to create a new image of herself and her life when she moves to England, and then has to repeat the same cycle again when moving back home. These relocations differ in the impact they have on H.’s life, creating a relatively tension-free break between past and future in the first case and a very serious rupture in the second case. Therefore it is an interesting case in conceptualizing different kinds of ruptures and the personal factors that may influence how a disturbance in the normal flow of experiences is perceived by the person.

An important point in understanding H.’s identity construction efforts is related to the transformation of a metasign complex. Being in a different socio-cultural context enables her to create highly generalized metasigns that form a complex: “This is the way I want to live”, “This is the person I want to be”, “This is the place I want to live”, “These are the people who allow me to be who I want to be”. While the interconnections between these metasigns are functional in the context where they were created, they are not functional in a different time and space context. Hence H.’s case enables seeing how the movement between contexts sometimes requires a transformation of a metasign complex, rather than

creating a new set of more generalized metasigns.

H.'s case also shows that in order to understand the mechanisms of identity construction it is not sufficient to investigate only the starting point and the end product of that process. H.'s self-searches start and end in some cases at the same point (e.g. the ideas about her relationship with her boyfriend or her ideas about her friends), and only the conceptualization of the trajectories that lead to the end point reveals inner struggles that would not be evident in a simple pre/post 'snapshot approach'.

H.'s case also offers interesting material for further thinking about the relationships between the voices of the others. Her case shows that voices of the others can enter into the semiotic auto-regulation by way of offering feedback and confirming one's self-understandings, but also by way of creating an opposition through which the self-definition can be achieved. This case also shows that, in addition to dialogues where the self is in a relationship with a voice of the others (i.e. self-other dialogue), semiotic auto-regulation also involves dialogues between different voices (i.e. other-other dialogue), where the self can initially take the position of the observer and enter into the scene only later.

8.4 The case of L.

8.4.1 Background

At the beginning of the study, L. is 20 years old. She was born in Tartu, the second largest city in Estonia, but moved to Tallinn when she was ten. She is an only child. L. attended one of the most prestigious high schools in Tallinn; she was a good student. During her school years L. was very much involved in sports; she joined a gymnastics club when she was four and continued with that sport until the end of high school. She took her sports very seriously and achieved very good results in Estonian context.

After graduating from high school, L. decided to go to study abroad. Prior to her arrival she had never been to England. She started her undergraduate studies in one of the well-known British universities in the Midlands, in the field

of Business Administration in autumn 2005. At the outset of the study L. is about to start her second year in England.

8.4.2 Timeline analysis

Timeline analysis reveals two main themes with related sub-themes that emerge throughout the study period (see Table 8.4.2):

1. I am a foreigner in England:
 - Purely positive ideas about the English context
 - Mixed ideas and feelings towards the English context
 - Being Eastern-European
2. I am more experienced now
 - Positive emotions related to personal life
 - Negative emotions related to personal life
 - New boyfriend
 - I am not that naïve anymore

Timeline analysis seems to indicate that the topic of being a foreigner in England emerges constantly throughout the study period, with initial positive ideas about the English context turning into mixed emotions towards that environment. The issue of being Eastern-European also emerges throughout the study period; however it needs to be kept in mind that in the first and last interview it is partly due to the intervention. The topic of personal life emerges in the second half of the study period. However, L.'s retrospective accounts suggest that this topic could have emerged also a bit earlier in time, even if it does not become clear from L.'s text at the time.

L.'s text reveals relatively few fluctuations in her emotions and thoughts (see Appendix E, Table E4). She seems to feel comfortable about expressing her general ideas. Her comments about Estonia and Estonians are lengthy, abstract and even somewhat critically philosophical. However, she is

more reserved and less open about her personal life experiences and related feelings and thoughts. This abstract and somewhat impersonal talk makes it difficult to extract specific themes from her text that enable seeing her sense-making efforts. Topics related to her friends in England and in Estonia, as well as her relations with her family, occur relatively often in her text, but it is difficult to see any dynamics in those statements.

Table 8.4.2 L. – Timeline analysis

	Aug. 2006 INT	Oct. 2006 QUEST	Nov. 2006 QUEST	Dec. 2006 QUEST	Jan. 2007 QUEST	Feb. 2007 QUEST	March 2007 QUEST	April 2007 INT	May 2007 QUEST	June 2007 QUEST	July 2007 QUEST	Aug. 2007 INT
I am a foreigner in England												
Purely positive ideas about English context	x											
Mixed ideas about English context		x	x					x				x
Being Eastern-European	x							x				x
I am more experienced now												
Positive emotions related to personal life						x	x					x
Negative emotions related to personal life								x	x		x	
New boyfriend										x		x
I am not that naïve anymore												x

8.4.3 Thematic analysis

8.4.3.1 I am a foreigner in England

Being away from her usual socio-cultural context places L. in a situation where she has to make sense of herself in relation to new social categories. Firstly, she is in constant contact with the ‘English other’. Secondly, the others around her impose certain identities (e.g. Eastern-European) on her that need to be accepted or rejected through negotiations.

The first contact with L. reveals her positive attitudes towards the English context and people (see Figure 8.4.3.1): *“It is this English pride, but I wouldn’t say that they are arrogant, rather they are proud of their British Empire.*

They are very open, never hide their true emotions, usually they express their opinions and are not afraid to do that [...] And of course the politeness. For example opening the doors, I've got used to that in England and it is nice if good habits of that kind remain" (INT1, 08/06). However, with time this initial positive picture starts to get new shades: *"At the same time I can't say that the problems in Estonia and in Great Britain are not that different. The problems are the same; just the grasp is different [...] So it raises a question whether this is a welfare society or not and how much better it is to live here, compared to Estonia?"* (QUEST, 10/06). L. is using her I-position "me as Estonian" to make sense of her new socio-cultural context; being Estonian is the prism through which she evaluates her new experiences and that offers continuity from the past through the present for the future. The comparison between her old and new socio-cultural milieus allows her to distance herself from the 'English other' and strengthens her being Estonian. Furthermore, being in contact with yet another socio-cultural context offers another perspective to English milieu: *"Returning to England I had a culture shock for couple of days. First it felt that there was nothing to eat anymore, because French cuisine is so fantastic compared to English [...] Second, people's attitudes: everybody is very open-minded, friendly and tolerant in England, but it turns into ignorance and carelessness in some cases. Even the look of the city and the buildings shows the level of culture. The French culture is much more elegant"* (QUEST, 11/06). She is a stranger in an English context and that enables her to value her being in that environment from many different positions. It could be hypothesized that the positive opinion about the English context was functional for L. in the first year, when she needed to make sense of her experiences in the situation: I am away from home, it is emotionally and financially difficult, but I made my choice and have to live with it; I made the right choice because everything is great here. By the second year however, she has got used to the new context and her new way of being in this context. Her choice of staying in England is solid and needs no further confirmations, so she can allow herself to be distanced from the context and notice new aspects in it: *"In the first year I had this childish enthusiasm. Everything was new and nice and great and it truly was. [...] But now when we returned, then you already know the basic things*

and then you can see also other stuff" (INT2, 04/06).

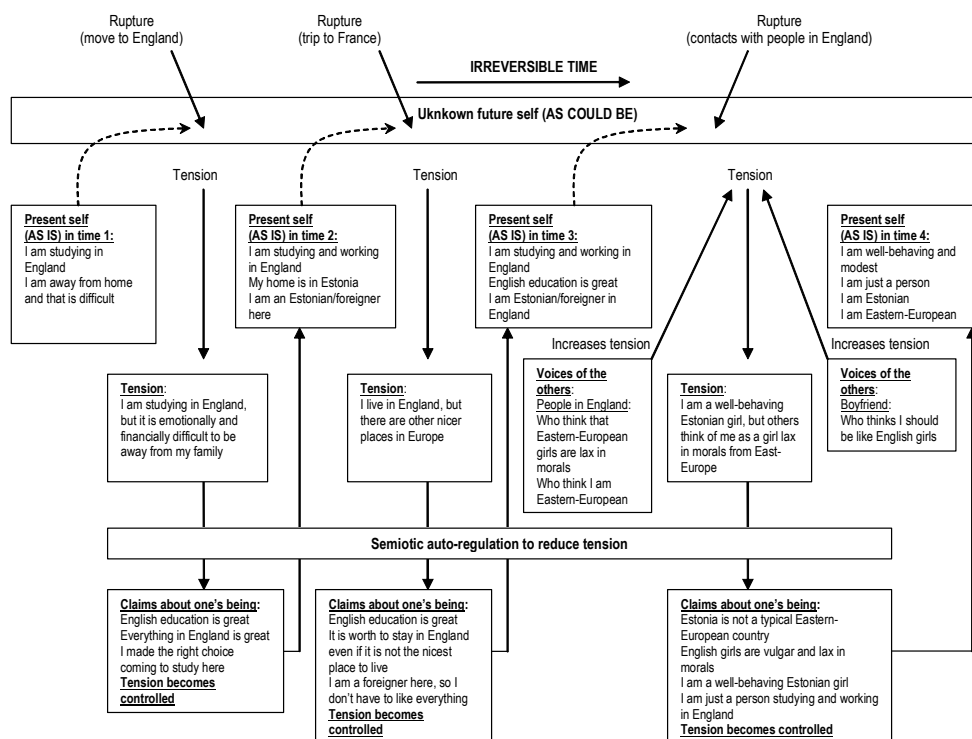


Figure 8.4.3.1 L. – I am a foreigner in England

Being in England L. experiences that others perceive her as a stranger in this environment. This may be seen as another reason why L. changes her perceptions about the English context from positive to more mixed. Being in England imposes new identities on L. – in addition to her being Estonian, she is often seen as Eastern-European. It seems that initially she considers this new category in general terms and does not resist it: *“I believe Scandinavian has a better flavour than Eastern-European, because all the time you read from the news, even somewhere in West-Europe, all the people with criminal background are from Eastern-European countries. It is this dark and bad place. But at the same time, geographically we are placed there and you can’t deny that and often you have to agree that yes, we are from East-Europe [...] It is not completely Scandinavia, even if Estonia really wants to be a Nordic country, be on the same level with Finland or Norway. This is what we want to be, but in reality we are*

more Eastern-Europeans. So we are not one, nor the other" (INT1, 08/06). She understands that belonging to that social category has a somewhat negative connotation, but seems not to take it as something that defines her being. However, her everyday experiences seem to bring along a shift in that distanced identification: *"Sadly, another thing I've felt here, is that Estonians as part of East-Europe, are treated like Russians, Polish, Checks, Hungarians, whoever. And they think that the girls from those countries are lax in morals. Of course you cannot fight the history of Estonia, but to a certain extent it leaves also a negative mark on me. [incomprehensible] Sadly here people don't understand it. It is like that and you just have to, well, you just have to ignore it and just go on with your life"* (INT2, 04/07). L. can accept the negative connotations of the label 'Eastern-European' on a general level, but resists attributing this meaning to her personal way of being: *"Or they come and say: "Oh, you're that Eastern-European girl" or "You're that Estonian girl". Then I feel like, I also have a name and I am just a person. It doesn't really matter where I come from. Not that I am denying where I come from or am ashamed of it. After all, Estonia is not a typical Eastern-European country"* (INT2, 04/07). In general, girls from East-Europe can be perceived as lax in morals, but this is not the case with her as a specific individual. In her attempts to resist this negative connotation L. creates a contrast between herself and English girls: *"Basically he assumes that I'm like a usual English girl. And when I say that I'm not English girl, I am Estonian girl and I have different principles of how a relationship should work [incomprehensible] then he claims that why can't I be, I don't know, as he would like me to be [...] I've been brought up, as I believe most Estonian girls have been brought up, to be modest and well-behaving and hard-working and honest and whatever, and it is just not acceptable for me"* (INT2, 04/07). In order to control the tension stemming from the identities others impose on L., she constructs certain categories of others through which to define herself: Eastern-European girls are lax in morals; Estonians are different from Eastern-Europeans; English girls are vulgar and lax in morals; Estonian girls are different from English girls. As a foreigner in England she can distance herself from those categories. This distinction between self and others enables her to see herself in a positive light and re-establish a coherent and

personally acceptable sense of self.

8.4.3.2 I am stronger now

L.'s text does not reveal serious fluctuations in her emotions during the study period. However, the retrospective evaluations indicate that, due to difficulties in her personal life, the year was emotionally rough for L. The unhappy ending of a relationship in January was followed by a satisfying period from February until April, when she created a relationship with someone from her course (see Figure 8.4.3.2): *"Now I have a boyfriend which is very nice. Instead of wasting my energy on troubles with boys, because I don't have these anymore, I can concentrate on other things, studies and work. I feel that now I have my own support, that gives me strength and that is a nice feeling. Simply superb"*; *"Lately I feel very happy [...] I've found my emotional balance thanks to my boyfriend, on who I can always rely and be sure of"* (QUEST, 02/06). However, that relationship also ends soon, leaving L. stressed and sad: *"I do have a boyfriend, but I'm not sure how long our relationship is going to last. We just had a serious argument and I gave him a last chance to improve himself, because he really has treated me very bad lately [...] I don't know why I let boys like him into my life"* (INT2, 04/07); *"In April-May my ex-boyfriend was able to completely destroy my emotional balance"* (QUEST, 06/07). The beginning of summer brings along another affair, that develops into a long-distanced relationship, but nevertheless makes L. happy and content again.

Looking back at her experiences L. admits: *"It seems funny now that I took it so seriously then. But I think there are ups and downs in my life, developments to different directions and that makes me stronger. Like they say, development or [incomprehensible] better being comes through pain [...] I believe all this has made me stronger. Perhaps some new situations don't surprise me anymore. After that I have [incomprehensible] not that I've become cruel or stony, not that. Just the things that have happened, have made me see things, I don't know, I've become smarter"* (INT3, 08/07). Through semiotic construction of a metasign "difficulties have made me stronger" L. re-configures the past. This metasign enables her to re-evaluate her negative past experiences, including her

own bad choices (e.g. allowing “this kind of person” into her life), in a more positive manner and see them as part of one’s positive being.

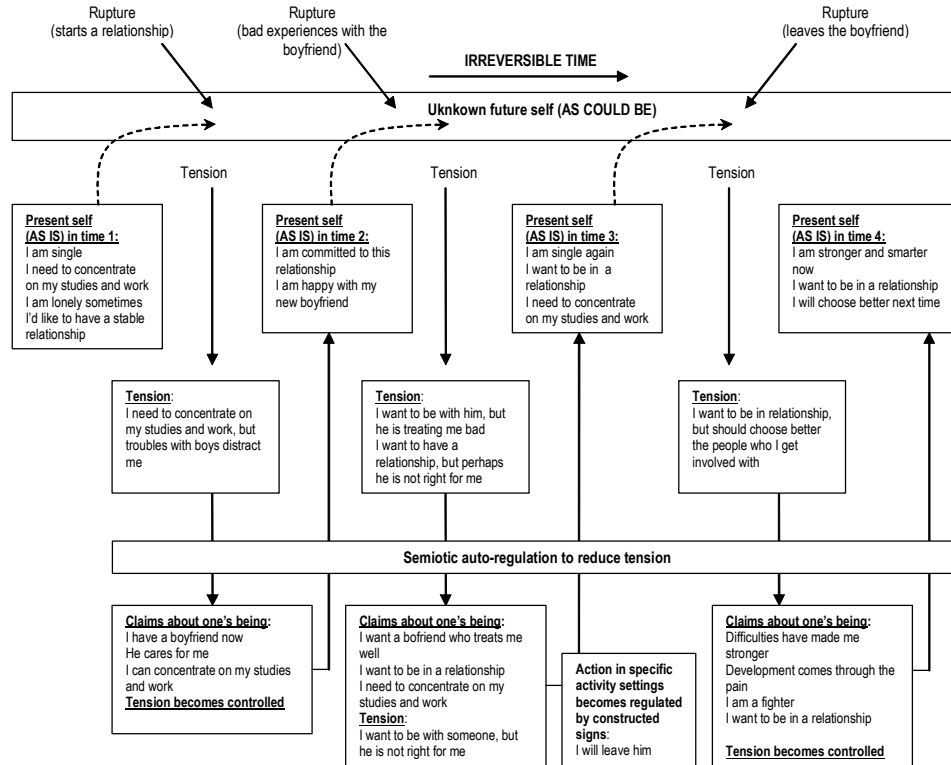


Figure 8.4.3.2 L. – I am stronger now

L. sees herself as someone who is not afraid of difficulties: “*I’m not really afraid of anything. I have a soul of the fighter. When there are difficulties, then you just need to find ways how to deal with them [...] If it doesn’t go once, it’ll go the second time, and if it doesn’t go the second time, it’ll go the third time [...] I’m not the kind who gives up. Sport has taught me this, if you loose once, you win another time. Loose, win... It’s just life. If you give up immediately, you’ll not achieve anything*” (INT1, 08/06). Dealing with the difficulties related to personal life matches with this idea she has of herself. This generalized metasign enables her to create a coherent and positive image of herself by linking different and unique life experiences.

8.4.4 Summary

As noted before, L.'s text does not reveal serious negative ruptures in her way of being during the study period. However, it can be assumed that her experiences in her personal life did create some negative tension and forced her to deal with questions of identity. Nevertheless, this case indicates that the data collection methods used in the current study may not be suitable for investigating identity struggles and negotiations with all individuals. L. may be a person who does not analyse herself and her experiences extensively. Her relatively neutral and tension-free text may also indicate that she does not like to talk or write about her deeply personal experiences. While the model proposed in this dissertation was applicable to her case as well, her text was still less informative when compared to other cases. This seems to refer to the need of considering other data collection methods.

8.5 The case of N.

8.5.1 Background

At the onset of the study, N. is 21-years old. She was born in Tartu, second largest city in Estonia, but lived for many years in Tallinn. Both of N.'s parents have higher education, and the family is relatively affluent. N. has a younger sister. The family is currently living in one of the European capitals.

At the age of 14, N. moved to the United States (US) for half a year due to her father's studies. She disliked living in the US. In 2002 the family moved to the city where they currently live due to her father's career developments. After graduation from the British International School, N. lived in Belgium for half a year, working as an *au pair*. Despite of the initial plan to go to study in France, she decided to start her studies in the field of international law in London. In order to be relatively independent from her family, N. found a part-time job in a local pub, while starting the full-time undergraduate studies. At the onset of the study N. has lived in London for one year.

8.5.2 Timeline analysis

The analysis reveals four main themes with related sub-themes in N.'s case that occur throughout the study period (see Table 8.5.2):

1. Where is my life heading?
 - I found myself in London
 - I am still searching for my way
 - Should I go back to live and work in Estonia or should I stay abroad?
 - What is more important – career or family?
 - Who do I want to be – a lawyer or somebody else?
 - Where should I do the Master's degree?
2. I do not want to be alone when I am 30:
 - Freedom and independence or close relationship?
 - Mobile lifestyle or close relationship?
3. I need to be focused
4. Home as a safe place to find the right direction again

The timeline analysis reveals that two themes are reoccurring throughout the study period: 'I need to be focused' and 'I am still searching for my way in life'. However, content-wise the occurrence of these topics is somewhat different. The content of the 'self-discipline' theme remains more or less unchanged throughout the study period. In the case of the latter theme, the socio-cultural context and social others who influence N.'s inner dialogues on that topic change during the study period, altering also the content of N.'s inner discussions. Until June 2007 the main dialogue partners for N. are her peers and colleagues in London and the main issue to discuss is her career choice. In the final part of the study N. goes to Estonia and therefore her old friends from high-school become her main discussion partners. The move to a different socio-cultural context brings the issue of close relationships to the surface, which collides with N.'s self-understandings as a free and independent young woman

always on the move.

Table 8.5.2 N. – Timeline analysis

	Sept. 2006 INT	Oct. 2006 QUEST	Nov. 2006 QUEST	Jan. 2007 (begin.) QUEST	Feb. 2007 (begin.) QUEST	Feb. 2007 (end) QUEST	March 2007 QUEST	April 2007 INT	May 2007 QUEST	June 2007 QUEST	July 2007 QUEST	Aug. 2007 INT
Where is my life heading?												
I found myself in London	x											
I am still searching for my way							x	x				
To live and work in Estonia or abroad?		x	x					x		x	x	x
Career or family?								x				x
Lawyer or somebody else?		x	x					x				
Master's degree – where?			x			x						x
I don't want to be alone when I'm 30												
Independence or close relationship?												x
Mobile lifestyle or close relationship?	x							x				x
I need to be focused	x		x		x	x		x				x
Home as a safe place to find the right direction again	x				x			x				

The sentence completion exercise reveals a striking stability in N.'s answers to the questions about Estonia (see Appendix E, Table E5). She has travelled a lot in her relatively short life. The year of the study period is when N. is preparing for another long journey: half a year in Norway and thereafter half a year in Belgium as an exchange student. Despite this mobile life-style the question of home seems to be relatively clear for N.: the home is Estonia. That is the place where she “*need[s] to return one day*” (QUEST, 06/07). It seems that this stable idea of home compensates the lack of real-life stability in relation to home that she has experienced in recent years. Having a place where she “needs” to return one day offers a sense of continuity in her insecure and uncertain mobile life. Even if she has not lived in Estonia for the last five years, the thought of that place functions as an anchor that also connects other strands of her life; the questions about a possible career and stable close relationships are considered

through the possibility of returning and staying in Estonia, as becomes clear in the thematic analysis.

8.5.3 Thematic analysis

8.5.3.1 I found myself in London

Graduation from high school can be seen as a multi-furcation point in N.'s life where she has to decide what trajectory to follow in the future. Reflecting on her past experiences, N. remembers the anxiety related to the uncertainty of the future (see Figure 8.5.3.1): *"I was a mess [said in English in an interview conducted in Estonian]! Like... in my head [last three words said again in English]"* (INT1, 09/06); *"I was very stressed all the time and all the time I thought: what will become of me, what will I be!"* (INT1, 09/06). The dilemmas about the field of studies, place of studies and a general feeling of being "a mess" exemplify that tension. This tension is deepened by the external pressure from the parents: *"There was a pressure from my parents, like what will you do and do this and do that and you know, really... a pressure"* (INT1, 09/06). These external voices, together with N.'s inner doubts and experiences with the uncertain future, create a situation where questions about one's identity become acute.

In order to deal with this tension created by a multiplicity of choices, none of which seemed to be the correct one, N. engages in internal auto-dialogues with the present self-understandings, as well as with the voices of the others, most importantly with that of the father: *"Me and my father we thought, what I liked to do and my father also said that listen, what about law? That it is a kind of, it is a truly proper field. And so I thought, okay, I'll try law [laughs]"* (INT1, 09/06). As a result of this dialogical engagement with different internal and external voices, she decides to start to study law. A generalized metasign becomes constructed, which gives her a clear direction and purpose in life. The internal tension is reduced by semiotic regulators: *"Now I have a clear thing to do and I don't have to worry about things all the time and... well, okay, I do need to worry about certain things, but I don't have a fear, like: Help! I will not make it! Or something like that"* (INT1, 09/06). These new subjective signs also become confirmed by

the external feedback: “He [a family friend she met] didn’t say that I have found myself, I don’t remember how he said it, but like, you ... you seem to be happy, that everything is fine with you. That your parents have seen changes in you” (INT1, 09/06). Hence, the unknown future self becomes known as a present self through the dialogical engagement with internal and external voices, which enables the creation of semiotic regulators that reduce the developmental tension.

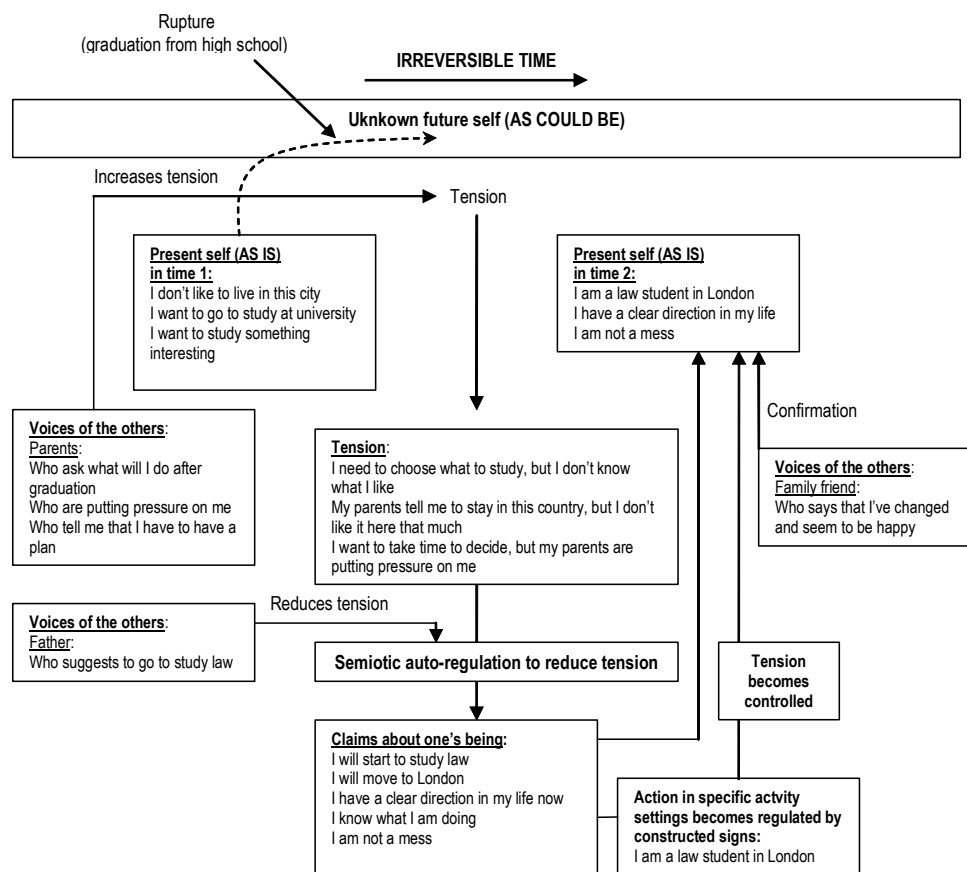


Figure 8.5.3.1 N. – I found myself in London

8.5.3.2 I am still searching for my way

After resolving a developmental tension related to the possible studies, N.’s first year at the university seems to be relatively free from these kinds of inner worries. However, the uncertainty related to the possible future trajectories becomes acute again in the second year of studies (see Figure 8.5.3.2): “We have to start thinking what we want to do in the future. Shall we become lawyers or do something else.

It is a somewhat difficult question for me at the moment, because I don't know if I want to go back to Estonia or not (QUEST, 11/06). N.'s answers show that the semiotic regulators that used to control the tension stemming from uncertainty (e.g. "I am a person with a clear direction and purpose in life" or "I like to live in London") do not function efficiently anymore: *"There is nothing certain, I don't have this strong and clear goal, I don't have this that I know what to do, so..."* (INT2, 04/07); *"I guess I don't know yet who I want to be and like this. There is no goal. I have a small goal, but the future is open. In that sense"* (INT2, 04/07). N.'s unique life experiences are brought together based on their similarity and they raise the questions about one's being in the world. In dealing with that anxiety N. seeks to answer two different sets of intertwined questions: What is the suitable profession for me?; Where do I want to live in the future? While it seems that the choice of profession ("I am a law student") offers some direction in terms of career trajectories, the uncertainty related to the place of residence creates a lot of tension for N.: *"Where do I want to settle down eventually when I grow up [laughs]? [...] I don't know if I want to go back to Estonia or stay here or I don't know"* (INT2, 04/07); *"I have found myself thinking, just like I said before, that I don't know where I will be. I like it here a lot, to be honest, but I don't know if I want to live here my entire life or should I live here another five years. Or where shall I do the Master's – here or somewhere else or will I go to Estonia. Lately I have all these questions in my mind"* (INT2, 04/07).

In order to deal with this tension N. engages dialogically with the perspectives of different others, which allows her to construct new semiotic regulators that define her desired future being. The perspective of the other functions as an opposition through which the present self is projected into the future and possible future trajectories are tried out: *"Some of the students are like this that they have already... One girl from my course is already working for a human rights organization and is active in that field [...] But I don't have... okay human rights, but I don't know if I'd like that. I don't know if I'm that interested in that"* (INT2, 04/07); *"I think I don't want to imagine life like this that I'm doing some sort of work... I am a woman, I don't want to sit somewhere... Because these positions there in the City are, like you are working 16 hours a day in the*

office and you have no life other than work. I am a woman, my goal is to have family and children and things like that one day. Because, I'm afraid that simply becoming rich will not make me happy" (INT2, 04/07).

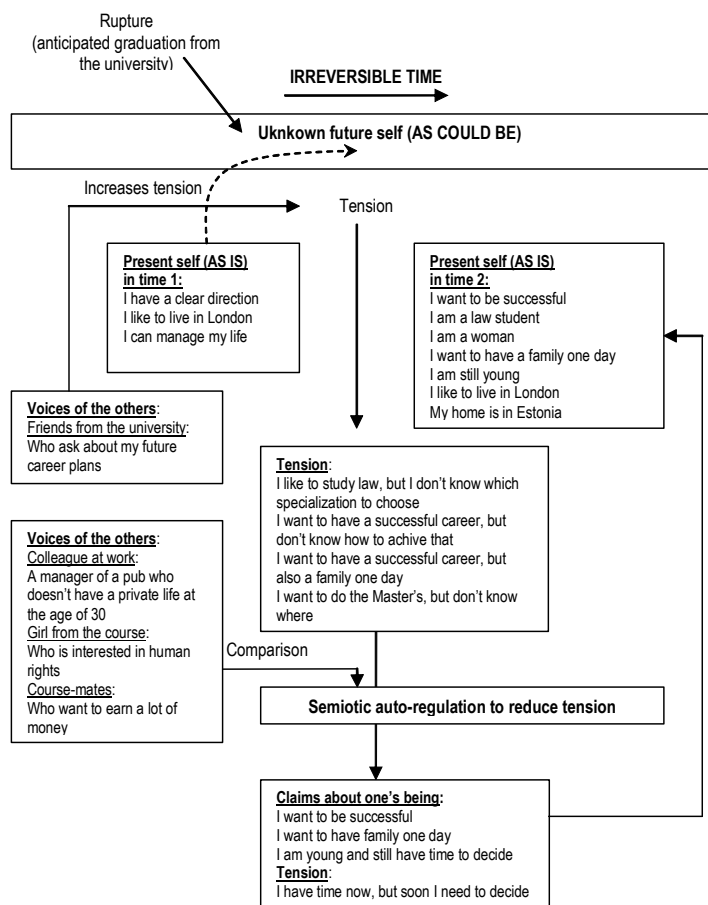


Figure 8.5.3.2 N. – I am still searching for my way

The dialogue between others' voices and present sense of being leads to the strengthening of some existing semiotic regulators (e.g. "I am a woman and I want to have a family") as well as to the construction of new ones that together control the inner tension by making the unknown future self partially known. However, these inner dialogues are only partially successful in dealing with the anxiety; the anticipated future rupture (i.e. graduation from university) brings the questions of identity to the surface of N.'s awareness. As she cannot find the answers to all the questions about possible future trajectories ("I know where I

want to arrive, but how do I get there?”), the tension that accompanies the movement from present into the unknown future is carried forward to the next moment in time.

8.5.3.3 I do not want to be alone when I am 30

Being in Estonia for a longer period after a year away adds another twist to the tensions N. experiences in relation to the uncertainty of the future. In addition to the questions regarding the place of residence and possible future career, N. finds herself dealing with questions about close relationships (see Figure 8.5.3.3): *“You see, that is another surprise. I came here and everybody has a child, or not everybody. But people who I would never have thought could have a child already or something. And everybody is living together or is already married”* (INT3, 07/07); *“Or, you know, old stories with some people here and some old love stories that have remained. See, these remain, they come back again and it is like...”* (INT3, 07/07). N.’s externalized ideas express the tension and fluctuation between two desired self-understandings: “Me as a free and independent citizen of the world” vs. “Me as someone who loves and is loved”. Both of these ideas function as desired life-goal orientations: *“And I know that I can’t allow myself [pause] a relationship, I cannot afford such a thing, because I am always moving from one place to another and people will not just sit and wait for me for two years”* (INT3, 07/07); *“Well in this sense it is a bit sad, that I cannot have a more serious relationship with anybody. That I’m always moving”* (INT3, 07/07); *“My life-style is very mobile, it is like, well sometimes I feel like bad, lonely... I feel lonely... But what can I do”* (INT3, 07/07); *“The others have and it’s good and before you have had yourself a longer relationship and so you know what it means and that it is good and you have someone to be with. But at this point in my life it doesn’t make any sense”* (INT3, 07/07). Despite the efforts to semiotically regulate this perceived conflict between different life-goal orientations, the tension is maintained and N. comes back to it time and again. She uses others’ perspectives to analyse her own situation and regulate the tension through that. The perspective of the other functions as an opposition through which N. defines herself: *“Thoughts about settling down and creating a home and my friends also*

say that they want to love somebody and give themselves to somebody. They are 22, 23, want to have children and build a family and want to have this calm life and just take it easy. Then I think that I wouldn't imagine something like that now. Let my life be as it is now. I still have time for this" (INT3, 07/07); "At the same time I have this, I look at other girls of my age and I think that they are not at all independent, they are so attached to their men. [...] I cannot understand how it is possible. I really need this distance of mine, that I am independent and can do my things. That I don't depend on anybody, you see, I don't want to be, I can't imagine being like that" (INT3, 07/07); "I can't imagine that I buy a house and have to pay the mortgage for 30 years. That I can't go, I can't go even to France in the summer for three months. I don't know, to study French, because I have a mortgage I can't do that. I can't imagine something like that" (INT3, 07/07). The position of the other is given a negative connotation and therefore it helps to make one's own position more desirable: undesirable "to have this calm life and just take it easy", "they are so attached to their men" as opposed to desirable "I am independent and can do my things". Through this opposition the present self-understanding is strengthened and therefore helps to regulate the tension. However, the perspective of the other (i.e. the one, who loves and is loved) is also desirable and therefore the efforts of semiotic auto-regulation do not eliminate the tension completely, but it is maintained and carried forward to the next moment: "I don't know exactly who I am, what I'm doing here, what I will be. Like what would I be and what the future will bring. And this is one of the worries. Okay, I am 22 now and also if I want to have a more serious relationship. It is actually a thing that makes me to think a bit, that at some point it would be nice to have something more serious. But when I return, then I will be 24. Okay, I'm not in a hurry yet. Well, 25 almost and then and... 23, 24. Well, yes, 24 more or less. Should have something more serious already. I don't want to be alone when I am 30" (INT3 07/07).

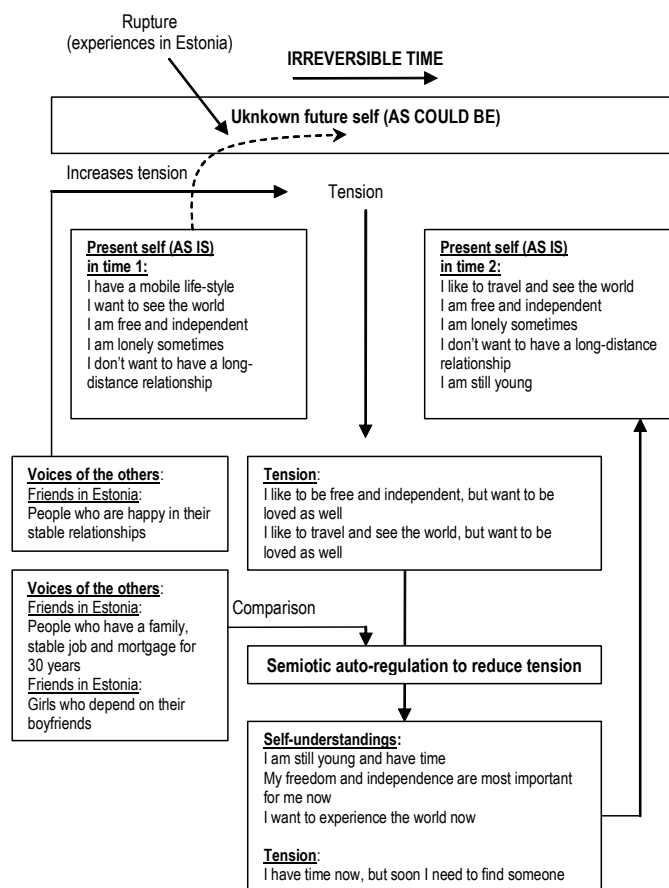


Figure 8.5.3.3 N. – I do not want to be alone when I am 30

8.5.3.4 I need to be focused

N.'s orientation towards a successful and personally rewarding career as well as her wish to be self-sufficient and independent is not always in accordance with her life-style as a student living away from home. On the one hand, she enjoys being a student and experiencing the life away from home. At the same time, she feels that in order to reach her life goals (e.g. to have a successful career) she needs to be focused and work a lot. The struggles to motivate oneself, to find a proper balance between studies, work and social life are reoccurring throughout the year (see Table 8.5.2 and Figure 8.5.3.4): *"I'm a bit afraid; the second year will be very tough. It will be full of work and I have set myself a goal to study every day. Not like last year, it was a complete... It was not normal what we did here. I felt*

so guilty the first year because I was so... You see, if you don't do anything and you have to do and you haven't done anything, then you feel like you are useless, because you don't do anything. [...] So this has to stop, I need to start the second year seriously. Simply put the head on the shoulders and work" (INT1, 09/06). On the one hand she enjoys the social life in London, but on the other hand it intervenes with her studies and makes her feel uncomfortable: *"The social life is sometimes too intense. Then I kind of forget the studies"* (INT2, 04/07); *"Even if you want to sit at home and do nothing, there is always someone who is pressuring you or somebody calls and invites you to do something. Sometimes it is difficult to say "no". The school-work fades to background because people are not focused [last word uttered in English]"* (INT2, 04/07). The intense social life has an impact also on N.'s economical situation as she needs to work part-time to support herself while studying. This adds another dimension to her inner tensions: *"I'm not very economical and if my friends invite me somewhere, then I say immediately, let's go. I don't know how to say "no". I need to always be surrounded by people and do something. My life-goals, perhaps these have changed"* (INT3, 08/07).

While N. sees the voices of her friends and colleagues in London as something that pulls her away from the desired self-discipline, she perceives the time spent at home with her parents as a way of getting back on track and finding the balance again: *"I went to [home] with the idea to get away from England, where everybody is influencing you. Friends have a huge impact on me"* (INT2, 04/07); *"Then I went home and my parents are also like, help to motivate me and from my father... My father tells me all sorts of things. And then I kind of got back on track and that was before Christmas, when I went and decided that now I've found the right direction and I'll organize my life"* (INT3, 08/07). However, the home is not only a place to relax and get back on track for N. It is also a place where her parents are telling her what to do and how to live her life: *"Home is a place, where I feel safe, well and where I can relax, even though the parents sometimes tend to tell me too much how to live my life"* (QUEST, 01/07). Hence, N. finds herself in dialogue with different voices and in negotiations with ideas which are pulling her to different directions. On the one hand, she needs to find a

balance between studies, work and social life and be motivated and focused. On the other hand, she wants prove to herself and to others that she is an independent and responsible grown-up who does not need her parents to tell her what to do (see the case of T. for comparison). While the efforts to regulate this tension lead to the strengthening of some of her self-understandings in relation to her life-goal orientations, the tension remains and reoccurs in other time and space contexts.

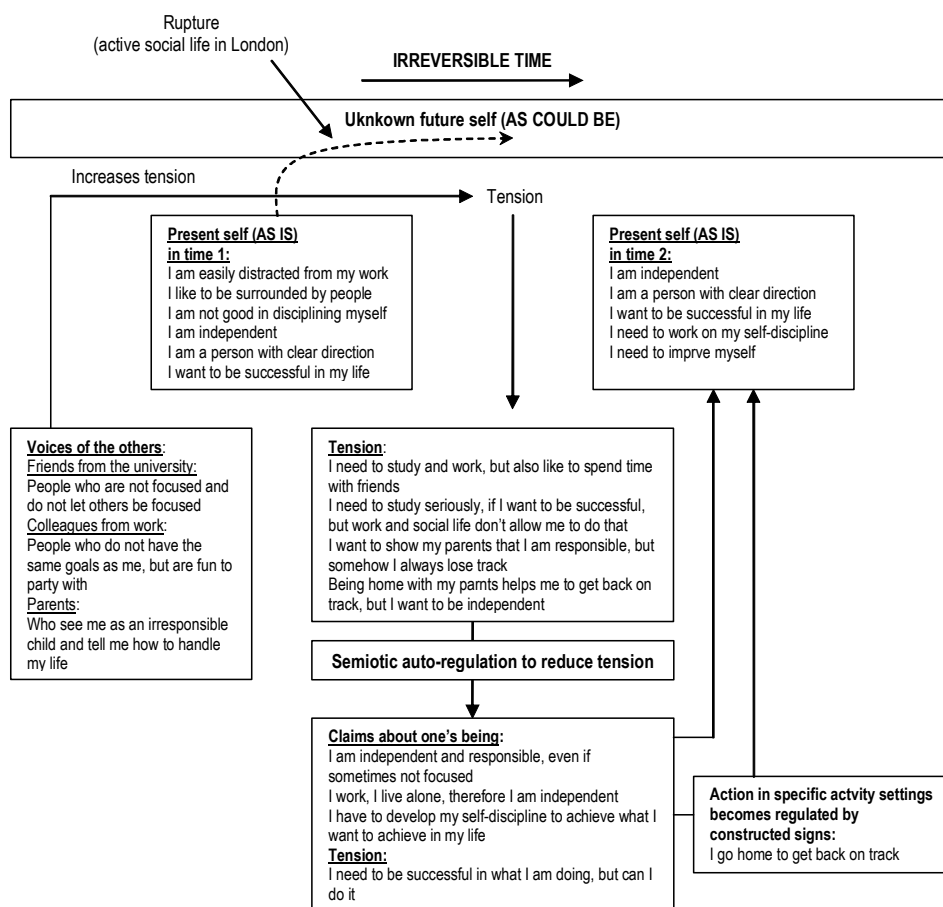


Figure 8.5.3.4 N. – I need to be focused

8.5.4 Summary

N.'s case reveals the identity construction episodes in relation to general life-goal orientations that seem to be typical for a person of her age and at her stage of life. While the study period is relatively stable and does not reveal any serious negative ruptures in N.'s everyday functioning, she experiences many anticipated future

ruptures that make her deal with the questions of identity and possible life-goal orientations. The questions about one's career choice, desire to have a stable relationship, and settle down, the need to balance between social life and studies, and prove herself as an independent and responsible young grown-up occur and reoccur in her everyday functioning and make her seek some stability and continuity in herself that would allow answering those questions and therefore permit moving further to the unpredictable future. However, the fact that N.'s life course has driven her to study in a foreign country, away from family and friends at home, accentuates these developmental questions about her life-goal orientations.

From the model-refinement point of view, N.'s case is useful for further conceptualizing the role of the others' voices in the personal sense-making process. The dialogical engagement with real or imagined, specific or generalized others is very clear in N.'s text. The voices of the others have different functions in her dialogues: they can be used to confirm one's way of being through similarity or through opposition; they can be utilized as ways of reducing the inner tension, but they can also function to increase the anxiety. Hence, the proposed model would benefit from a more specific presentation of these different functions of others' voices.

8.6 The case of P.

8.6.1 Background

At the beginning of the study P. is 25 years old. She comes from a big Estonian family and is the oldest among six children, having one sister and four brothers. She was born in a small town close to the Latvian border, but moved to Tartu when she was 15. Since then she has lived alone, away from home. She does not have very strong links with her family, however home and parents' values have influenced her choices and ideas vastly.

P. completed her B.A. studies in the field of humanities at Tartu University. For the last two years she has lived in Tallinn, where she worked in

the public sector, being considered a very good specialist in her field. She is very passionate about her field, a mixture of environmental studies and humanities. She comes to England to start her M.A. studies in one of the country's most prestigious universities. Prior to her arrival, she has never been to the UK.

8.6.2 Timeline analysis

Timeline analysis reveals four main themes with related sub-themes that emerge throughout the study period (see Table 8.6.2):

1. I am smart and successful:
 - Poor performance, lack of self-confidence, feelings of self-blame
 - Confidence about one's skills and abilities
 - Supervisor and final project as challenges
 - Confusion about one's position in the job market
2. What should I do in the future?
 - Successful career as life-goal orientation
 - Close relations as life-goal orientation
 - 'Take the maximum' as life-goal orientation
 - To stay in the UK or go elsewhere?
 - To have a challenging or peaceful life?
 - To travel or to settle down?
3. "Being Estonian is a full-time job":
 - Others: Americans, 'speakers'
 - Ideas about Estonians
 - Being Eastern-European
 - Disappointment in Estonia and Estonians
4. My name – my identity:
 - Stability from home and family values

- Sister's name change

Timeline analysis seems to indicate that the first part of the study period is relatively stable for P. (see Table 8.6.2). She does experience new situations, meets new people and is trying to make sense of herself in relation to others, as is evident from the fact that the topics related to Estonians and the others, especially Americans, emerge mostly in that period. The other topics appear relatively rarely in the period from August to January, as opposed to the period from January to May. The latter is the period of serious inner turmoil for P. Questions about her performance and her success, as well as her possible future trajectories appear in that period resulting from her mixed everyday experiences. The last couple of months of the study are again a somewhat more stable period for P. from the point of view of her self-confidence. However, she is actively engaged in trying to figure out what to do in the future in that time-phase.

P.'s answers to the sentence completion exercise that reveal the fluctuations in her feelings and thoughts help to map the abovementioned periods in her life (see Appendix E, Table E6). P.'s ideas and emotions change both in relation to her studies in England, and in relation to her Estonian heritage. Both fluctuations are clearly related to the events in P.'s life. The studies become suddenly more difficult in January-February, when she receives mixed feedback on her performance. The fluctuations in her feelings and ideas about Estonia and Estonians seem to be related to the April 2007 events in Tallinn, that make her feel more distanced and disappointed in her homeland and compatriots.

Table 8.6.2 P. – Timeline analysis

	Aug. 2006 INT	Oct. 2006 QUEST	Nov. 2006 QUEST	Dec. 2006 QUEST	Jan. 2007 QUEST	March 2007 (begin.) QUEST	March 2007 (end) QUEST	April 2007 INT	May 2007 QUEST	Sept. 2007 INT
I am smart and successful										
Poor performance, lack of self-confidence, feelings of guilt			x			x	x	x		
Confidence about one's skills and abilities						x	x		x	x
Supervisor and final project as challenges						x	x		x	x
Confusion about one's position in the job market								x		x
What should I do in the future?										
Career as life-goal orientation	x			x	x	x				
Close relations as life-goal orientation						x	x	x		x
'Take the maximum' as life-goal orientation			x				x	x		
To stay in the UK or not?					x	x		x	x	x
To have challenges or to live a peaceful life?						x		x	x	
To travel or to settle down?					x			x		x
"Being Estonian is a full-time job"										
Others: Americans, 'speakers'		x	x	x		x	x			
Ideas about Estonians	x		x					x		x
Being Eastern-European	x		x					x		
Disappointment in Estonia and Estonians										x
My name – my identity										
Stability from home and family values	x				x		x	x		
Sister's name change						x		x		

8.6.3 Thematic analysis

8.6.3.1 I am smart and successful

Previous experiences at home from studies and from work have enabled P. to construct a metasn of herself as a smart and successful young woman. However, her new life experiences in England seem not to match with these self-understandings (see Figure 8.6.3.1). P. has high expectations about her performance, but is not always able to deliver and this creates frustration and self-blame: *“The first presentation in English. And a serious self-blame afterwards, that I didn’t perform better”* (QUEST, 11/06). The feedback on her first assignments is also somewhat mixed and P. interprets it in very negative terms: *“I heard that my essay was “not bad”. And then I heard that it was “not good”. And this comment was very hard for me because I had spent weeks writing this essay and thought the result was quite good”*; *“After this meeting on Tuesday night I walked in the rain for two hours and tried to cool down. Thereafter I spent two-three days in a complete emotional hole. All the pride I had about my essay was smashed into pieces [...] The only thought was, why did a IQ-negative as me had to come here”*; *“In short, I have never felt so stupid and insecure in my life”*; *“I didn’t go through that much not even in October when I moved here. Emotions have jumped up and down, from one extreme to another and at the moment I feel quite baffled”* (QUEST, 02/07). The negative feedback P. receives touches the core of her being and is therefore taken extremely seriously. She is not willing to let go of her self-understandings that have until now defined who she is. However, the new experiences raise questions of identity: Who am I? What am I doing here? In order to deal with this inner tension and answer these questions P. uses others’ voices: *“It has helped me a lot to hear that others – both course-mates and Ph.D. students – have had similar experiences in relation to the feedback and atmosphere in general. And there is nothing unique about my experience”* (QUEST, 03/07). This allows seeing her failures as caused by external factors, leaving the core of P.’s self intact. She also uses her life-goal orientations to deal with the tension: *“Many have given up his supervision, but I’ll try to take on the challenge”* (QUEST, 03/07). The supervisor and the final project are re-

conceptualized as challenges and therefore it makes sense for P. to try to handle them. In the flow of her everyday experiences P. soon also receives feedback on her performance that is in accordance with her self-concept: “*So this repeated ‘swallowing’ lasted for two and half weeks. And partly still continues. But I have had couple of moments based on which I’ve tried to rebuild my destroyed self-confidence*” (QUEST, 02/07); “*It was one of the best reading groups during these language-and-abilities related somersaults, when I was in a good shape, was able to think along, comment, be clever and even flirt. It gave me back a lot of my self-confidence*” (QUEST, 03/07). Soon she has re-established her sense of stability; she knows that she can be successful in this new context too, and this also allows resisting external pressures that try to make her feel otherwise: “*This constant eating out each others’ nerves. You sit in the library and then they come with a pile of books: “Have you read this? Have you read that?” [...] You get this huge panic attack [...] Then I decided that I’ll just do as good as I can and you avoid these situations. Perform as good as you can. Anyway, you’ll not fail*” (INT2, 04/07).

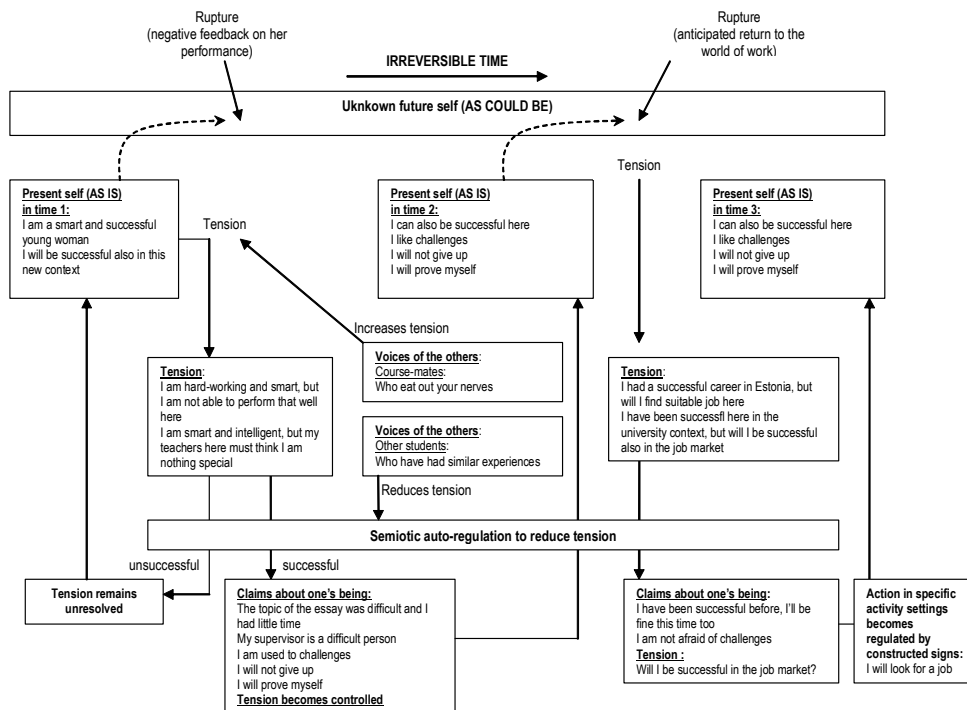


Figure 8.6.3.1 P. – I am smart and successful

However, the questions about one's identity re-emerge again when P. starts to think about the move to the world of work in England. This is yet another new context for her and she is not sure whether her self-understandings hold true there: *"You know who you are in Estonia [...] I really was having meetings and exchanging emails with deputy ministers [...] And in this context it is absolutely unthinkable"; "It is confusing for me in relation to the future, that I don't really understand who am I"; "At the moment I just don't understand where would I fit. Am I too ambitious if I want to have a normal job here, some sort of specialist position? Or do I devalue myself?"* (INT2, 04/07).

8.6.3.2 What should I do in the future?

The time in England is for P. a period of exploring her options for the future. The change in the socio-cultural context cannot be perceived as a serious negative rupture in P.'s life, nevertheless, it enables her to step out from her normal life-trajectory in Estonia and survey the alternatives from a distance (see Figure 8.6.3.2). Questions about her future (e.g. Where to live? What kind of job to do? etc.) emerge as important issues to consider: *"I should choose whether to do something for the soul or to think about possible future job positions. And if I select the practical option, what kind of job I want to do [...] I am now in a position where the first round of studies is over and it shouldn't be a problem to find a well-paid job. Now the question is what I want to do; in what corner of the world do I want to live etc."* (QUEST; 01/07).

On the one hand, P. continues her life in England as she is used to, taking everything very seriously and trying to experience as much as possible: *"At the same time I do blame myself a bit, for not being even more active, talking to people more and making more friends. Because I have only one year!"* (QUEST; 11/06). She is used to living an intense life, full of different events and challenges, and she wants to continue living in that way in England too. On the other hand, she is starting to question if the challenging life is what she really wants: *"Sometimes I think that I am truly an idiot for taking on those challenges all the time. Feel like I'm really struggling and almost do not succeed. I should just rest on my laurels and enjoy the results [...] In some ways I would like to stay in*

England to see that all the 'swallowing' this year has been worthy. And to get to know the culture better. But it would mean outdoing myself again and I don't know if I can be bothered anymore. I should rather dedicate myself to the relationships and to friends, should educate myself and widen my horizons" (QUEST, 02/07). Hence, to a large extent P.'s questions about future are related to her life-goal orientation of having a successful and rewarding career. However, she also feels that being close to friends and loved-ones is an important life-goal orientation: "The relationships have somehow become much more important for me in recent years. When I started working, I completely dedicated myself to work. I got to the point where I kind of started to turn into a workaholic [...] At some point you realize that the job is not everything, the work can let you down [...] Now I've kind of come back to appreciating my friends and relationships" (INT2, 04/07). The questions about a future job and relationships are also linked to her doubts about the place of residence: "I'm kind of in a stage where I have worked, I have succeeded and now I'm starting to appreciate the relationships I have more and more [...] When I look at my course-mates [...] They travel to the end of the world because that's where the work is. Well, I feel that it's unthinkable now, even if five years ago it would have been exactly the same" (INT3, 09/07). P.'s past self is similar to her course-mates, while she clearly distances her present self from those others. She also uses others' voices as a way of confirming and justifying her present choices: "People's talk about their partners moving to England has had a very positive effect on me [...] it gives you some sort of tranquility and security that people still believe in certain values!" (QUEST, 03/07). P. is at a multi-furcation point in her life, where she needs to decide which trajectory to follow. In her inner dialogues she looks at the future from many different imagined I-positions: 'me as a successful career woman', 'me in a relationship', 'me living in England' etc. While the 'me in a relationship' seems to be a favoured position, in reality she is still single and therefore cannot use that position to make her choices: "Couple of years ago I desperately wanted everything to be fixed and settled. Now it is the other way around. Now I feel that I've at least 4-5 years and I'm even scared that if I'd started a very serious relationship now, I'd have to settle down. At the same time I've seen here very

flexible living arrangements, people moving to different parts of the world and so it goes and everything works” (INT2, 04/07).

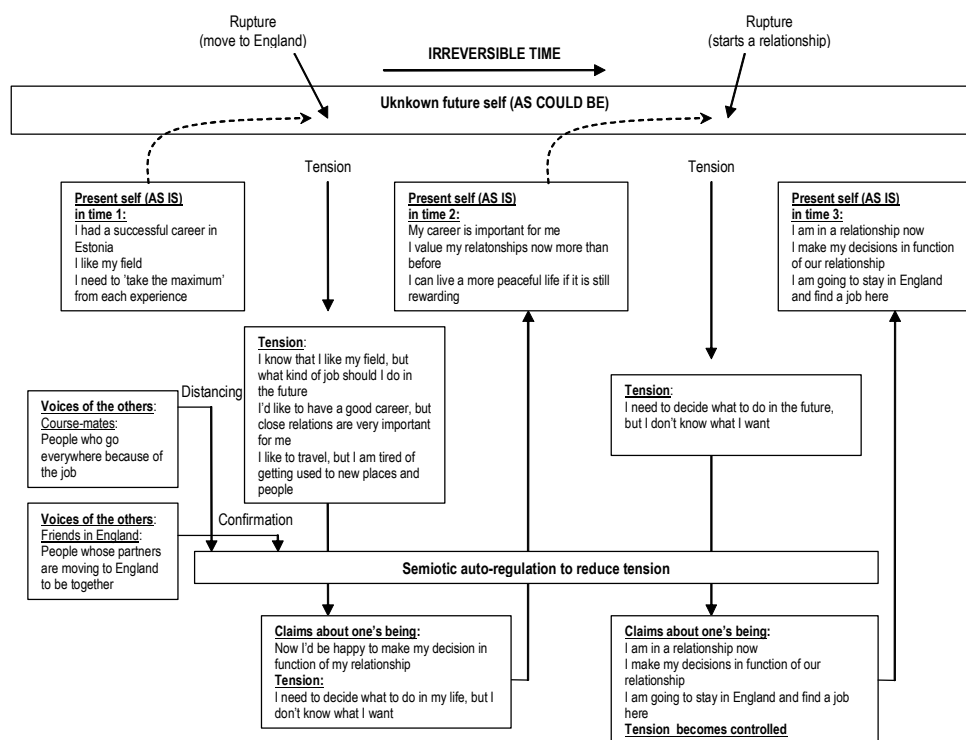


Figure 8.6.3.2 P. – What should I do in the future?

P.’s questions about her future trajectory become clearer when she starts a new relationship in England. Suddenly her imagined ‘me in a relationship’ position becomes a reality and she can use this position to make the decisions about her future: *“It is clear that, first, I’ll stay here [...] I don’t know, I feel that I am not into moving from one place to another [...] Now I have him and I’ve found some very-very good friends, who will stay here and I feel that I can’t change all the time and therefore I do prefer England as a place to work now. So I’ll stay here” (INT3, 09/07).*

8.6.3.3 “Being Estonian is a full-time job”

The move to England places P. in a situation where she is surrounded by people who are new to her and different from her. The difference from others makes P.

more aware of her own being in relation to those others. As P. does not initially know the people personally, she tries to make sense of them and herself in relation to them by referring to generalized group categories. This leads to a distinction between ‘me – Estonian’ and ‘them – Americans’: *“A thing I’m still not used to and probably never will, is Americans eating during lectures!”* (QUEST, 10/06); *“In Estonia you had to keep quiet unless you had something very important to say. Here Americans (more than half of my course-mates are Americans so they use their majority) are constantly making comments and asking, so that the lecturer often runs out of time. And the questions are not terribly smart”* (QUEST, 11/06); *“I’ve understood that I’ve somehow completely ignored America and know nothing about it [...] So it’s funny – I’ve thought I’m not familiar with exotic cultures, but it appears I know nothing of America”* (QUEST, 12/06). Soon however this distinction becomes replaced by the contrast between ‘them – speakers’ and ‘us – non-speakers’: *“I invented ‘speakers’ to contrast these course-mates who speak English as their mother tongue (hence native speakers) to those who don’t (non-native speakers) [...] A small rift between ‘speakers’ and ‘non-speakers’ has appeared [...] I have friends on both fronts, perhaps even more among ‘speakers’, while many ‘non-speakers’ don’t or have friends only among themselves. At the same time I feel that ‘non-speakers’ are deeper and you can discuss other matters with them”* (QUEST, 03/07). Belonging to the category of ‘non-speakers’ has several functions. Firstly, it enables P. to make sense of the fluctuations in her performance (e.g. *“It is not that I am not smart; I am just not that good at English”*). Secondly, being a ‘non-speaker’ gives her a possibility to belong somewhere, to be part of something bigger. She is the only Estonian, but as a ‘non-speaker’ she is not alone; there are others like her. Furthermore, being a ‘non-speaker’ enables her to be Estonian: *“With my lecturers I feel that... Estonians, or in general people from small nations, they meet and then they ask: “Oh, you come from Estonia, how are things there? What do you have there?” And then an Estonian is already prepared to give a long presentation about Estonia [...] They don’t care about that at all. They just speak about these X countries but they don’t learn from their audience”* (INT2, 04/07). ‘Speakers’ do not care about her being Estonian, while ‘non-speakers’ enable her to have “a full-

time job as Estonian”: *“When he [an American who is married to an Estonian] wants to make his wife upset, he says: “Being Estonian is a full-time job”. Because his wife [...] is also accustomed that everybody comes and asks and then she explains how things are in Estonia. And the wife is quite disappointed that nobody really cares”* (INT2, 04/07). While P. utilizes the distinction from the other as a way of confirming her identity, she also takes a slightly more distanced look at it, when writing down a joke about Estonians: *“An American, a Russian and an Estonian are in the zoo and are staring at a huge elephant. The American thinks: “Really cool giant creature. Should take it back to the States, show it to people for money and become rich”. The Russian thinks: “Really cool creature. Should take it back to Russia, would be nice to drink vodka together. It’s big, so wouldn’t get drunk too fast”. The Estonian thinks: “I wonder what this elephant thinks of me?””*(QUEST, 03/07).

P.’s life abroad places herself in dialogue with other Estonians as well. Her text reveals that she is patriotic about Estonia: *“By now I’ve already had three occasions when I realize, after meeting my friends and talking to them in Estonian, how important they and that language is for me. And how few Estonians there are. And Estonian men. I really get all patriotic”* (QUEST, 11/07). However, while feeling close to that socio-cultural context, the events in Estonia make her also doubt her patriotism: *“I can’t stand this, first, this tremendous ambition, and second, this narrow-mindedness and this bigotry, that is there in Estonian politics and in all the discussions”; “I would like to get back my faith in the republic and in this kind of thing, but now I rather feel a total counter-reaction towards all this”* (INT3, 09/07). In relation to ‘that Estonia’, P. is someone else, a distanced other: *“I definitely feel less Estonian, vastly less Estonian than before”; “I’d like to stay away for a bit longer and get back the faith and positivism. I’ve lost it along the way”* (INT3, 09/07). Hence, P.’s being Estonian is functional in relation to the English context, but does not have the same meaning in relation to the Estonian context. She is Estonian in relation to the ‘speakers’ she meets in England, and this identity gives her a sense of continuity. However, she is “less Estonian” in relation to other Estonians. Here other self-understandings are used to achieve a sense of sameness: *“I’d rather contribute to*

general human values and environmental issues on international level” (INT3, 09/07).

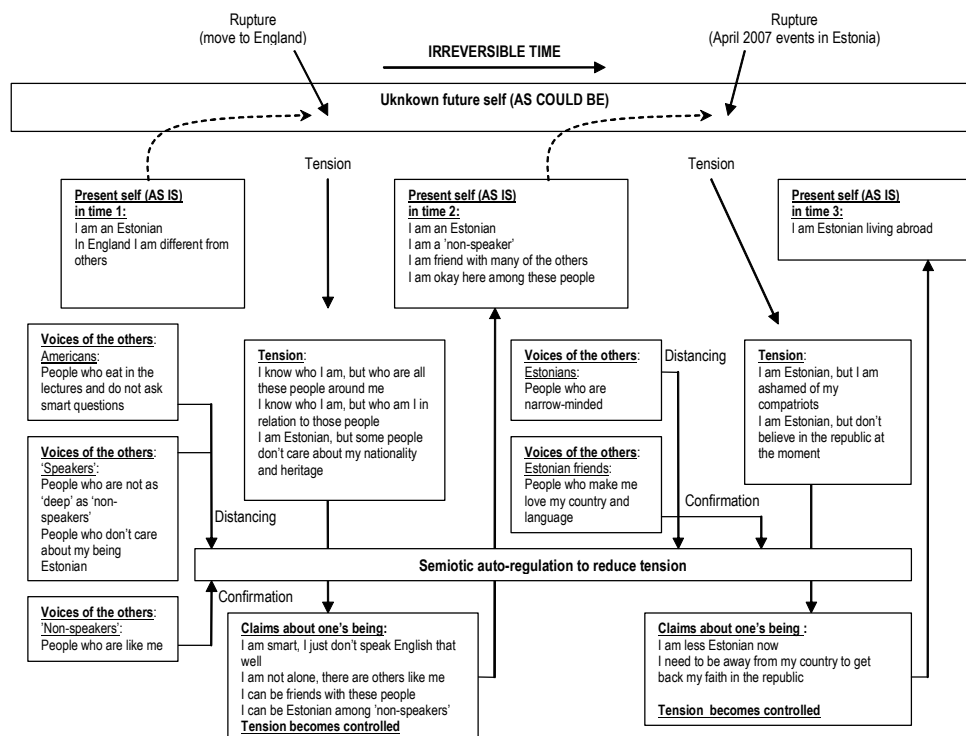


Figure 8.6.3.3 P. – “Being Estonian is a full-time job”

8.6.3.4 My name – my identity

P. has a very interesting and, in the Estonian context, very unusual first name. Her name reflects the values and worldviews of her parents. P. is very proud of her name and sees it as central to her sense of self: *“My self-consciousness to a large extent circles around my name. I think of myself as P. and I think it is very different, that I don’t do it, can’t do it differently. But it is a very-very important thing for me”* (INT2, 04/07). It is her name and the family values that it carries, which give P. a sense of coherence and stability in the midst of new and stressful everyday experiences: *“You constantly encapsulate yourself around the idea, that I am P., this is my background, I am this and that and you rely on certain things that have been and remained somewhere”* (INT2, 04/07). Being so attached to her name, P. feels very frustrated when her English university constantly ignores the

specific letter 'ü' in her name: *"It truly bothers me how they ignore these dots [...] I can't stand it. I've been polite and everything, calmly reminded them, but I constantly get smacked in the face, up to the point that I'm already worried that they will not use them on my diploma"; "They know how things should be. It's like some sort of disturbing privilege that you are demanding your stupid dots and I don't know what else. They know how things are. There are no more letters [...] Perhaps I'm so touchy about this because my name has always been so central for me. If it was an ordinary Estonian name, perhaps it wouldn't matter that much"* (INT2, 04/07). The difference between her as an Estonian as opposed to 'speakers' who force their rules upon her being, is also evident here.

Being away from home, among strangers and in the midst of new and stressful experiences, P. clings more strongly to the identity and the values that are reflected in her name. However, these efforts to maintain a sense of stability are shaken by a serious rupture: she finds out that her sister has changed her first name. This is a painful realization for P.: *"Suddenly you realize that the things that have been there at home or in the family or in the history, they are actually not there. It feels as if someone has pulled the carpet from under your feet. I felt that somehow the things at home are changing so fast that I cannot rely on them. Or on some values that have always existed. In that sense it was a painful blow for me"* (INT2, 04/07). She has always thought that the name has the same meaning to her sister and therefore interprets her actions as "derisive" and "spitting". In dealing with this tension P. tries to rationalize the situation: *"In the end it's not that tragic and there are practical reasons and perhaps it is easier for her in that way"* (INT2, 04/07). She also refers to the idea that she is very different from her sister. Still, her text does not reveal how exactly she re-establishes the *status quo* beyond this serious rupture that shakes the deepest values of her being: *"This situation was grave for me. If I was at home and wasn't relying that much on those, so to say, values, perhaps it wouldn't have had that effect on me. But in that moment it was harsh, like: how can you do something like that!"* (INT2, 04/07).

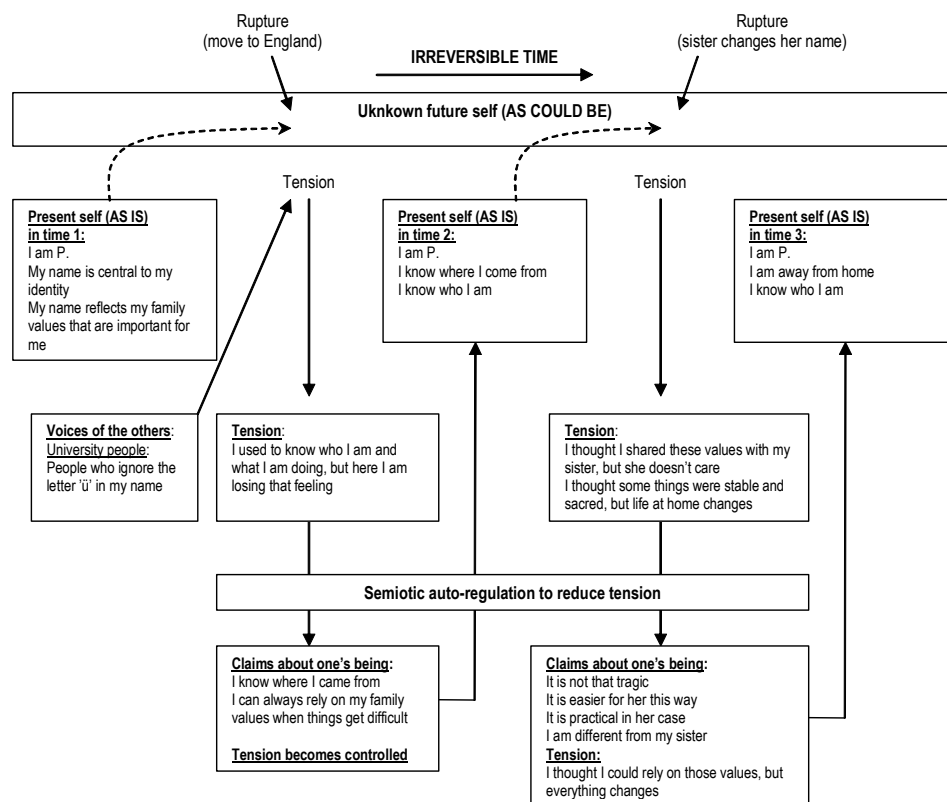


Figure 8.6.3.4 P. – My name – my identity

8.6.4 Summary

P.'s case enables to see how identity construction is related to certain life events in an individual's life that create a rupture into one's normal flow of being. The negative feedback to P.'s performance and her sister's name change are clear examples how an unexpected and sudden life event can create tension, fluctuating emotions, and bring the questions of identity to the surface of one's consciousness. At the same time this case shows that ruptures that trigger identity construction should not only be conceptualized as sudden and negative life events. Reaching a certain stage in one's life, where questions about one's life-goal orientations appear, can also be conceived as a rupture, even if it is a gradual break in one's usual way of being.

P.'s case is also interesting for it reveals the role of the others in one's

identity construction. It enables seeing how the real or imagined opposition with others functions as an important identity maintenance and confirmation device. However, it also shows how the similarity with the other can be used to strengthen one's sense of being.

8.7 The case of R.

8.7.1 Background

At the beginning of the study R. is 25 years old. She comes from Tartu, the second largest city in Estonia. This is where she has spent her childhood, went to school and graduated from the university. R. comes from an Estonian family; she has a younger sister to whom she is much attached. R. has never lived away from home.

After finishing her high school studies in an elite school that specializes in exact sciences, R. went to study humanities at Tartu University. She was very successful in her studies and was considered to be a promising young academician in the department. She was almost at the end of her Master's studies at Tartu, when she decided to start a one-year Master's programme in the same field in one of the South-West universities in the UK. Prior to her arrival to the UK, R. had never visited the country.

8.7.2 Timeline analysis

Timeline analysis reveals four main themes with related sub-themes that emerge throughout the study period (see Table 8.7.2):

1. I am smart and successful:
 - I have always been successful
 - I am not good enough (lack of self-confidence)
 - I am doing fine
 - It has been a bad year

2. Where should I live?
 - Patriotism, worry about Estonia
 - Estonia/Tartu is too small
 - Cosmopolitan England
 - My new independent life
 - What to do in the future?
3. I have good friends both in England and in Estonia:
 - Friends in Estonia
 - New friends in England
 - New relationships with old friends
4. I am a smart Eastern-European woman:
 - I am Eastern-European
 - I represent Estonia and Estonians here
 - Positive feelings towards Russian culture
 - Negative feelings towards Russian culture
 - Smart Eastern-European woman
 - It is the person, not the nationality that matters

The most frequently occurring topic in R.'s statements is related to her friends in Estonia and new friends in England. This topic develops from a slight sadness related to the move abroad and worry about making new friends, to a stable state where new friendships offer the needed intimacy and old friendships carry on at another level. The issue of making friends and meeting new people feeds into another theme that repeatedly occurs in R.'s talk – the question of nationality. This theme moves from a strong sense of and interest in national differences to an understanding that it is the person that matters and not the nationality.

The other two topics emerging from R.'s talk are also interrelated. The

feelings and thoughts about one's success are fluctuating in relation to everyday experiences – the self-confidence increases in situations where R. receives positive feedback to her work and decreases when she is in the process of finishing some assignments. The questions about possible future trajectories and the place of Estonia or England in these plans occurs throughout the study period, but is content-wise related to R.'s fluctuating self-confidence.

Table 8.7.2 R. – Timeline analysis

	Aug. 2006 INT	Oct. 2006 QUEST	Nov. 2006 QUEST	Dec. 2006 QUEST	Jan. 2007 QUEST	Feb. 2007 QUEST	April 2007 (begin.) QUEST	April 2007 INT	May 2007 QUEST	July 2007 QUEST	Oct. 2007 INT
I am smart and successful											
I have always been successful	x	x	x								x
I am not good enough (lack of self-confidence)		x	x	x	x				x		x
I am doing fine			x				x	x		x	
It has been a bad year											x
Where should I live?											
Patriotism, worry about Estonia	x				x			x			
Estonia/Tartu is too small	x			x	x		x	x			x
Cosmopolitan England		x	x					x			x
My new independent life				x			x	x			x
What to do in the future?	x				x	x	x	x	x	x	x
I have good friends both here and at home											
Friends in Estonia	x		x	x	x	x	x		x		
New friends in England		x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	
New relationships with old friends			x					x			x
I am a smart Eastern-European woman											
I am East-European	x							x			
I represent Estonia here		x									
Positive feelings towards Russian culture	x		x								
Negative feelings towards Russian culture					x			x	x		
Smart Eastern-European woman			x	x			x	x			
It's the person, not nationality, that matters				x	x	x	x	x		x	x

R.'s answers to the sentence completion exercise show her swinging feelings about Estonia (see Appendix E, Table E7). On the one hand, she is proud of and patriotic about her country; on the other hand, she sees it as too small a place with too few opportunities. Her ideas about Estonians are usually presented through the opposition with Brits in a way that allows her compatriots to appear in a positive light. R.'s repeated usage of comparison with other nationalities that helps her to make sense of her own being in a new socio-cultural context becomes clear also from the thematic analysis.

8.7.3 Thematic analysis

8.7.3.1 I am smart and successful

R.'s previous experiences have enabled her to think of herself as an intelligent and academically successful young woman. She is ambitious and wants to succeed also in the new socio-cultural context. However, the new everyday experiences in England do not provide her with an immediate positive response to her performance (see Figure 8.7.3.1): *"I feel like on the crest of a wave – sometimes in the bottom, sometimes a bit higher up. Still very far from the top. Self-confidence academically is still zero. Some presentations go well; in other cases my reading is sputter, and I'm ashamed of it for several days afterwards. One of my problems is that I'm scared to speak in the seminars. I am simply scared. I haven't been much of a talker in Estonia neither, but here I'm completely blocked"* (QUEST, 11/06). R. experiences that her existing self-understanding (i.e. "I am a smart and successful person") may not be functional in the new context. In her attempt to deal with this tension, she clings to the idea of her being an ambitious person, who moves towards her goals slowly, but steadily: *"It was okay as an introductory attempt – in the future I'll try to take on more serious challenges like at Tartu. In reality I have never liked to be treated differently due to my gender or nationality"* (QUEST, 10/06). On the one hand she seeks for opportunities to demonstrate her abilities; on the other hand is anxious about these: *"I need to write essays in some of the courses. I am already quite anxious about it – I want to succeed so badly that it can harm my performance"* (QUEST, 11/06). She has not been able to demonstrate her skills and abilities yet, but will try to do that in the future.

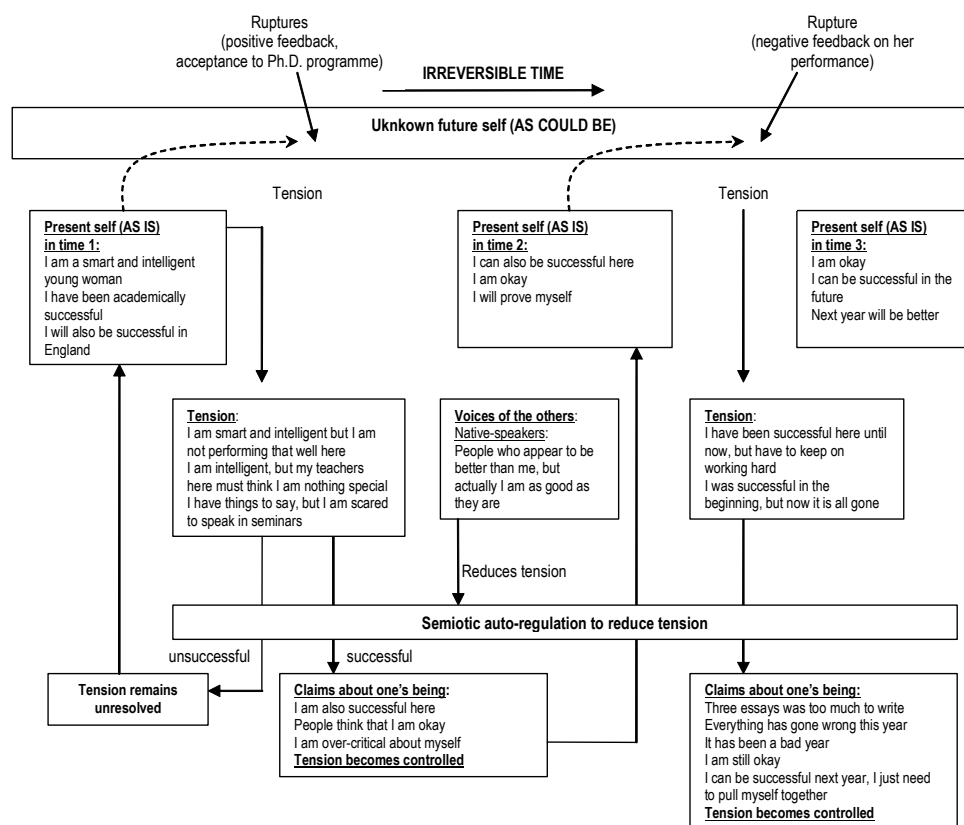


Figure 8.7.3.1 R. – I am smart and successful

Initial fluctuations in self-confidence in response to different everyday experiences soon become resolved by positive feedback to R.'s first assignment as well as by the fact that the department accepts her application of doctorate studies. This positive feedback allows R. to see that the self-understandings she utilized to make sense of herself in Estonia are functional also in the new context: *"If before I thought that I was one of the dullest and most narrow-minded people in our department, then I don't think like that anymore. I'm just over-critical about myself, compare myself even with the English native speakers and presume that I should be on the same level with them on everything. It feels like, not considering the grammar mistakes and less fluent speech, I can compete with them. In that sense I'm a bit more self-confident. But I cannot slack away; I still need to write three big essays and the dissertation, so I have to keep on stretching"* (QUEST, 04/07). The comparison with the others, especially with native speakers, functions

as a standard against which to measure one's success and abilities: *"I have even got better grades than English, so I think I can compete there"* (INT2, 04/07).

Despite this mid period of relative self-confidence, the end of the academic year brings new experiences that make R. doubt her abilities again. The final assignments do not go well and she is also very insecure about her Master's thesis: *"I have this paranoia that I will fail with my dissertation. I just feel so bad, because it was below any of my standards"* (INT3, 10/07). The fact that she has not been clearly successful in the new context bothers her: *"Academically I couldn't pull myself together and everything has gone wrong this year. In Estonia I got an A for my B.A. dissertation, also for most of my Master's subject, in the end of B.A. I had only A-s, 4.7 was the average grade in Master's, I think [maximum is 5 in the Estonian system]. Now all of it has disappeared"* (INT3, 10/07). She tries to make sense of this experience and deal with the tension by referring to external factors: *"It did inhibit my academic self-confidence, but at the same time, I have written many good things in my life and I'm already old enough not to take these failures as proof that I'm a failure as a person. I blame different factors for these failures – three essays is too much, stress etc."* (QUEST, 07/07); *"But actually all this year I have felt that it has been a bad year in some sense [...] Somehow it feels that with this number everything goes wrong [...] Should even start to believe in astrology"* (INT3, 10/07). Through the attribution of failures to the external factors, the core of R.'s being remains intact. R. connects different negative experiences to create a metasign "This has been a bad year", and this allows the other metasign "I am a smart young woman" to remain unchanged. The latter self-understanding is still functional, offers her a way of dealing with the present situation and gives her a direction and confidence to move towards the unknown future: *"I feel a bit bad, so starting my doctorate studies, if I pass, I need to become better"* (INT3, 10/07).

8.7.3.2 Where should I live?

R.'s plan to go to study abroad is guided by her life-goal orientation to have a successful and fulfilling life (see Figure 8.7.3.2): *"I have lived all my life in Tartu and practically, most of that time also with my parents. So, really, to become more*

independent. To see the world. Not only for the studies, but also to develop personally” (INT1, 08/06). She feels that Estonia, especially Tartu, is too small and offers too few opportunities to achieve something and be successful: *“I don’t know, once I’ve been to England, do I want to return to this tiny Tartu anymore? I do like it a lot there though. But the sphere of action is more restricted there, due to its smallness. So yes if you want to achieve something you have to also look further. We will see where I’ll find job and so on once I return”* (INT1, 08/06).

The move abroad brings the questions about R.’s possible future home into her awareness: *“Perhaps I’ll be able to continue abroad in the future. I’m not sure I want to complete my doctorate studies here in Tartu after that”* (INT1, 08/06). The questions “Where is my home?” and “Where do I want to live?” are important in relation to her career plans. She decides to stay in England for her doctorate studies and in light of this choice the return to Tartu seems undesirable. However, she does not find any funding for her studies and therefore finds herself reconsidering the possible life in the UK: *“At the moment I’m not so sure anymore that I want to stay in England. Before I was quite sure that I’ll stay here longer, but now I don’t know anymore. I enjoy being in Estonia and with Estonians, even if many nice things stayed behind in England”* (QUEST, 07/07). R. is fluctuating between the two ideas – she would like to return to England and continue her studies there, but has to face the possible reality of not being able to do that. Thinking of the life in Tartu in positive terms makes that possibility less frightening. However, the decision to go to the UK despite the lack of funding allows her to think positively about the UK again: *“I would not have been able to stay in Tartu at any cost now”* (INT3, 10/07). While the life in the UK without funding is difficult, it is in accordance with R.’s life-goal orientations and therefore the right thing to do: *“I had that thought during the first week. Living this miserable life is quite bad. Why should I do that? For what? At home I’d be fine, I’d live fine if I’d get that scholarship and would give some lectures. [...] Yes, but friends have told me that it is worth it and I should hang on. It is also an experience. I have never been in a position where I have to fight for my living or work hard or suffer or anything. My parents have always earned quite well and so perhaps it’s good”*; *“Yes, it has decreased my motivation sometimes, but then I*

think that I have to, I don't have a choice. What should I do, not to finish the Master's studies? This is the route I have chosen that I need to get the Ph.D., go to work in the university. This is my goal and plan and I have nowhere to retreat" (INT3, 10/07). In dealing with the tensions caused by difficult financial circumstances R. semiotically connects the idea of returning home and living at home with the idea of living easily. On the one hand, it is a positive sign – "I can return home and the life there is easy". On the other hand, this sign has a negative connotation – "I want to achieve my goals and I will not choose the easier way of returning home". Hence, the difficult life in England becomes more positive. Creating these semiotic regulators helps R. to control the anxiety and continue her life abroad irrespective of difficulties.

R.'s inner struggles related to her possible future home have another dimension. For a young and ambitious woman who wants to experience the world and be successful, the life abroad seems reasonable and desirable. However, when R. looks at this choice from another I-position, as an Estonian, it does not appear completely positive: *"People start to go abroad more and also stay there [...] Perhaps this is even bad for the Estonian nation [...] What will happen to poor Estonia if everybody goes away? How do you develop it and so on?"* (INT2, 04/07). It seems that living away from home makes R. worry about her homeland and brings her patriotic feelings to the surface of her awareness. Her patriotism is influenced by other Estonians' voices: *"I don't know if people will see this as a betrayal in the future or how these things will be. I am planning to return, but I know many people don't"* (INT2, 04/07); *"It seems that Estonians still have some sort of protection reaction or complex towards strangers. It is still thought that going abroad is a form of becoming a Germanized Estonian¹¹"* (QUEST, 01/07).

¹¹ Germanized Estonians were the ones who abandoned their ethno-cultural roots in favour of German culture during the period of German rule in Estonia. These people were usually received positively neither by Estonians, nor by Germans.

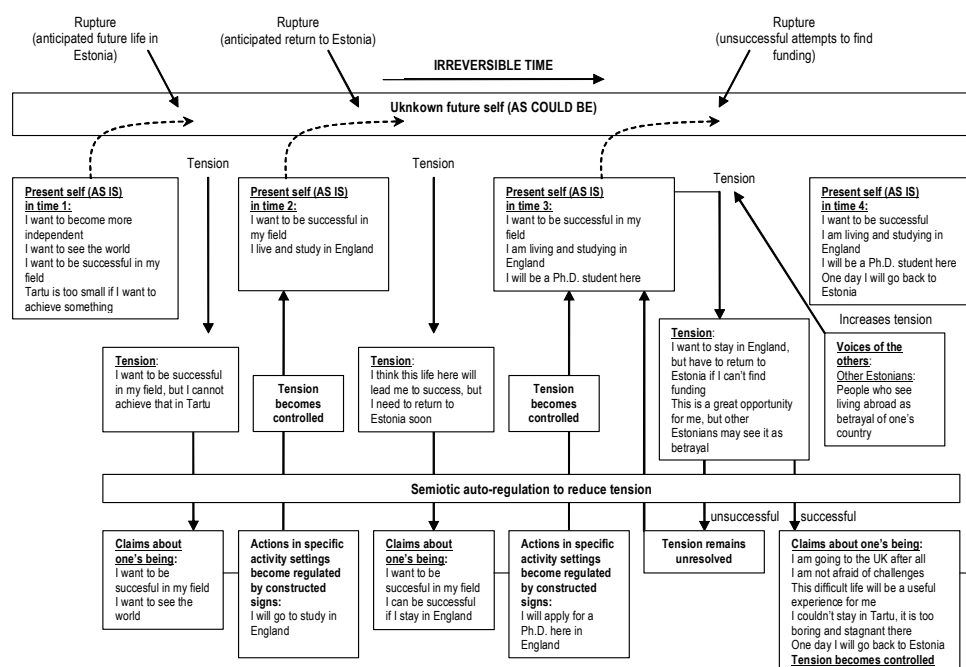


Figure 8.7.3.2 R. – Where should I live?

The idea of returning home one day offers a chance to distance oneself from this negative evaluation. In the present, however, the patriotic ideals are simply abstract ideas that R. likes to contemplate about, but does not necessarily use to guide her own choices: *“It matters to me generally. But at the same time I am an egoist and individualist, and so probably I would not live my life according to those ideals”* (INT2, 04/07). The idea of a possible return to home becomes transformed, but is still kept alive in R.’s ideas: *“I don’t know my mood changes all the time. [...] I started to think with horror that what if I’ll come to the point when I actually don’t need to return to England anymore. I need to stay in Estonia. To be honest I don’t want to think about it now. At the same time I really liked it in Estonia in the summer. I don’t know, probably I’ll have to stay being amphibious”* (INT3, 10/07).

8.7.3.3 I have good friends both in England and in Estonia

The move away from home puts R. in a situation where she can no longer use her ordinary social network for everyday social functioning, but has to create a new

one. Initially she is worried that, due to her modesty and being reserved, she will have difficulties in finding friends in England (see Figure 8.7.3.3): *“In the beginning I was scared that a truly modest person like me will not find any friends here. That I have to spend my time in the dorm, studying. But actually it’s not that bad anymore”* (QUEST, 03/07). However, being aware of that possibility makes her more active and willing to initiate the relationships with others: *“Of course the need to satisfy your social needs pushes you here in England. In Estonia the friends are one phone call or a text away and the company is always there. Here you have to come out from my bubble, overcome the initial modesty”* (QUEST, 10/06). Initially, she creates good relationships with other foreigners and therefore a distinction between ‘us – foreigners’ and ‘them – English’ emerges. This brings along an interest towards the other: *“I’m still a bit like an alien [...] We, foreigners, seek each others’ company to satisfy our social needs. And common problems and background connect us – life in the dorm, being away from home etc.”* (QUEST, 11/06); *“When I was at my grandma’s on Christmas Day, and there was plenty of good food on the table, I was thinking that we shouldn’t be ashamed of this in front of Brits. It is strange that this ‘Interesting how?’ perspective has emerged”* (QUEST, 01/07; see also Appendix E, Table E7). However, as the relationships develop and R. becomes more familiar with her new friends, the nationality becomes less relevant and more person-related characteristics become crucial instead: *“So yes, the boundary between English and foreigners is starting to fade away. As everybody speaks English anyway, I often don’t even think anymore where they come from or what is their mother tongue”* (QUEST, 12/06); *“I used to think that they are all just a bunch of arrogant Brits, all looking and acting more or less the same, but now specific characters are starting to emerge”* (QUEST; 03/07). In the end of her first year in Britain R. feels comfortable and happy amongst her new friends: *“We already have our group of people who invite each other to the pub and spend time together [...] I felt that the company has come together and I have new friends here”* (QUEST, 07/07).

The move away from home means being away from the people R. used to spend her time with. It especially means to be away from her sister: *“I am quite dependent and attached to my sister and friends”* (INT1, 08/06); *“When I went I*

was worried about my sister the most. How will I manage without her? We are very close. We were always together. But you'll get used to it" (INT2, 04/07). Despite the new relationships R. creates in England, she still feels that her most special friends are back at home: *"I consider my Estonian friends to be the real ones"* (QUEST, 02/07); *"I feel I'm not that attached to my Estonian friends anymore. Nevertheless, they are irreplaceable and will stay closer to me than the random friends I've found here"* (QUEST, 03/07); *"I felt again how nice it is to be with Estonians and that I have more soul-mates there"* (QUEST, 05/07). The friends from home are also a safe haven where R. can turn when things do not go well in England. In the periods of hard work and little social life the friends from home offer the emotional contact R. needs: *"I'm planning to meet Estonians, miss them already. In the end of February my friends will come here, I'm looking forward to it already"* (QUEST, 01/07). R. deals with the tensions of being away from her sister and friends by referring to her life-goal orientations that life in the UK is helping her to follow: *"[I want] to become more of an independent person there. I have many good friends, but perhaps it even fosters the degeneration, when you enjoy each others' company too much and perhaps you don't develop personally that much"* (INT1, 08/06); *"I think we [R. and her sister] have both become more independent and widened our company thanks to that. But we get along very well, I couldn't say otherwise. Rather, it is more interesting now, or we both have our stuff. I think she enjoys talking to me more now that we are not together all the time"* (INT2, 04/07). The metasigns "I want to become independent" and "I want to grow personally" help R. to deal with the anxiety of being away from friends. This helps her to turn a negative experience into something positive, to see it as a desirable situation. She uses the same semiotic mechanism to deal with the fact that all her friends are moving away from Tartu: *"Probably majority of that company is scattered around the world next year. And I'm not that sad about it. Life has to move on"* (QUEST, 03/07). The metasigns "Life has to move on", "Our new experiences enrich our friendship" and "My friends are like me, they want to have an interesting life" help to deal with the tension caused by these new life experiences and help to create a coherent picture of R.'s being in the world in the midst of new situations, relationships and

experiences.

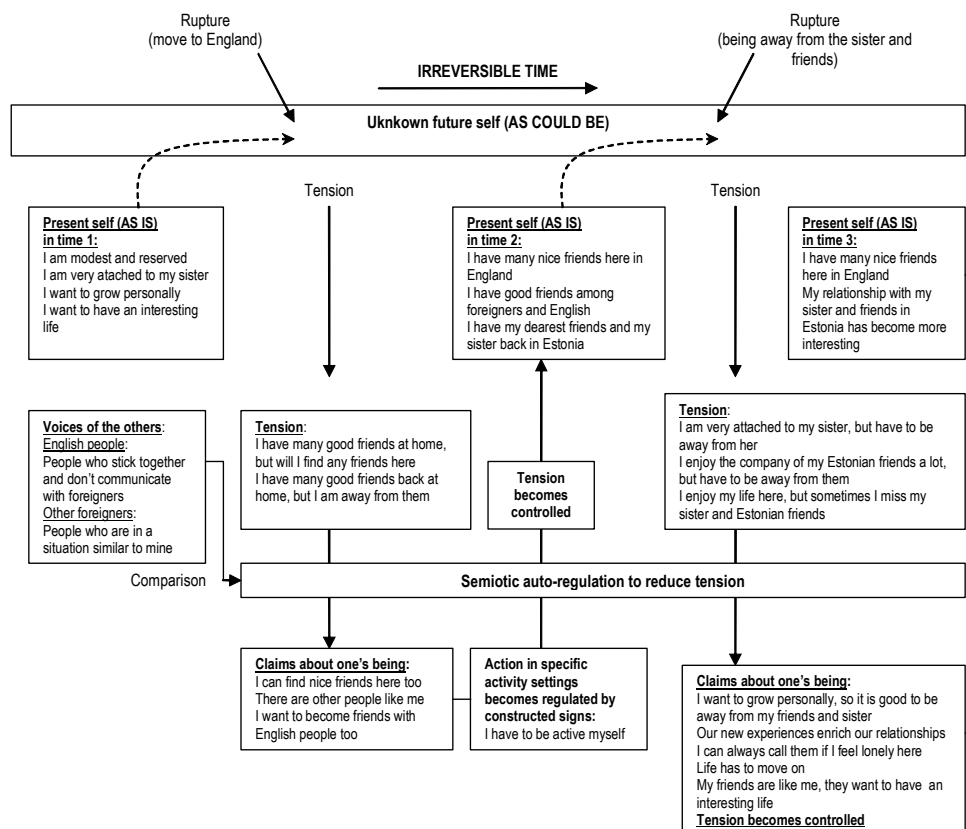


Figure 8.7.3.3 R. – I have good friends both in England and in Estonia

8.7.3.4 I am a smart woman from East-Europe

R.'s everyday experiences have led her to construct an idea of herself as an Eastern-European person (see Figure 8.7.3.4): *"I don't consider myself to be Nordic, not to mention Scandinavian. I do think I am Eastern-European [...]* These days it is more fashionable to consider ourselves, Estonia to be part of Nordic countries. But I am not ashamed of our Eastern-European heritage or anything. For me, Estonia is Eastern-Europe and there is nothing to do about it" (INT1, 08/06). In her mind this sign has a positive connotation: *"Perhaps some sort of laissez-faire style. I don't panic about meeting certain rules or following certain career paths [sighs] [...] Carelessness and perhaps some sort of negligence and laziness, that are considered to be typical Russian characteristics"*

(INT1, 08/06). This positive idea she has about Eastern-Europeanness is interrelated also to R.'s positive attitudes towards Russian culture. That becomes especially relevant for her during her stay abroad, when Russians, from whom she has felt different in Estonia, suddenly become familiar and similar: *"Funny enough, I've started to miss Russians. I don't emphasise the difference between Russians and Estonians anymore. They seem to be more familiar than English. I am happy to talk about my Russian friends and Russia"* (QUEST, 11/06). While these positive ideas turn into negative ones after the April 2007 events in Tallinn, they still offer a possibility to deal with something familiar and offer a sense of continuity in the midst of new experiences: *"My love of Russian culture and music decreased to something very tiny. Because at the moment I think that majority of Russians are brain-washed and agree with Putin's actions when it comes to his Estonian-politics. Fortunately I have a Russian friend who is like a voice of reason for me, that I shouldn't make generalizations"* (QUEST, 05/07).

R.'s experiences in England create a rupture into her seemingly stable and tension-free self-concept. She realizes that the label "Eastern-European" might have a rather negative connotation in that new socio-cultural context: *"It seems they don't have good opinion about Polish [...] I didn't think anything bad of Poland [...] for me, I thought Poland was more developed than Estonia, what is there to be ashamed of. But yeah, it seems Polish are simple workers here. Typical Eastern-Europeans"* (INT2, 04/07). R. has to deal with this tension between her own positive identification with East-Europe and others' negative attitudes towards that identity. In her attempts to deal with this tension R.'s feelings and thoughts are fluctuating. On the one hand, she finds positive signs that are related to that identity and therefore strengthen her existing self-understanding: *"I've heard people saying that women from East-Europe are pretty. If they consider me to be Eastern-European, I am not that sad about it, to be honest"* (INT2, 04/07). On the other hand, she tries to differentiate herself from the image British people might have about Eastern-Europeans: *"I don't want to classify myself as part of the gang who is earning easy money with simply jobs here in England"* (INT2, 04/07). She has not yet had enough experiences of the people around her and she does not know how they perceive her. She also has not

yet been able to demonstrate her personality, skills and abilities, and therefore feels somewhat insecure. R. is trying to cope with this anxiety by choosing to identify with the possible positive meanings related to the social category of Eastern-Europeans, while distancing herself from the possible negative ones. In addition to the off-putting incidents related to the East-European identity, R. also experiences antifeminist attitudes from one of her co-students: *“I’ve never felt inferior due to my gender. Not in any groups have I felt less smart or less capable than men. On the contrary”* (QUEST, 12/06).

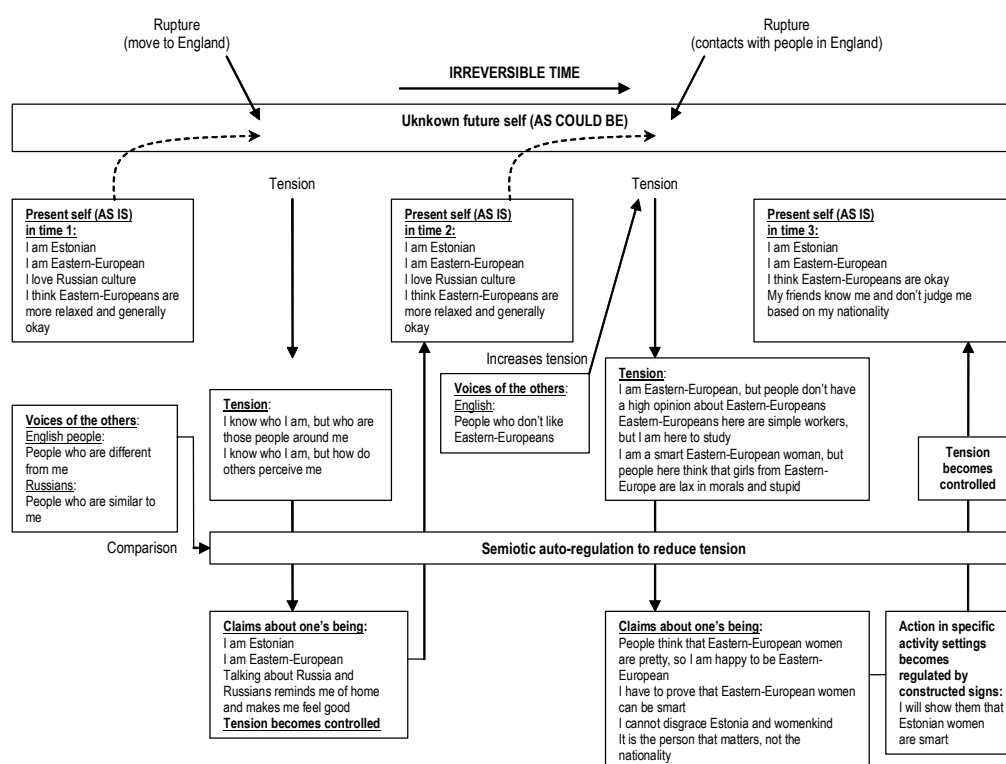


Figure 8.7.3.4 R. – I am a smart Eastern-European woman

In her attempts to deal with these tensions, R. turns to her self-understanding as a smart and successful young woman from Estonia. She wants to demonstrate that young women from East-Europe can also be intelligent and achieving: *“I feel the obligation to perform well. Even more, I cannot disgrace Estonia and womankind here”* (QUEST, 11/06); *“I was proud to tell my friends here that I’m going to visit a friend who is studying at Oxford – as if it is a proof*

that Estonians, and women are not that dull after all” (QUEST, 11/06); *“In general I think I’m not considered too dull here. But I need to still work hard, because among other things I still want to improve the image the English have of Eastern-European women”* (QUEST, 03/07). R. is not willing to change her ideas about herself under the external pressure, but rather executes her active agency and tries to change the collective culture through her externalizations.

As the time goes by, the issue of Eastern-Europeaness seems to fade into the background of R.’s everyday functioning. The question of nationality loses its importance to R. – she does not consider others’ nationality to be an important characteristic anymore and sees also her own nationality to be less of a problem: *“I’m not fussed about being Eastern-European and foreigner. Rather I want to show my skills and abilities and study well”* (QUEST, 01/07); *“I don’t like to be considered purposefully different because of my nationality [...] Of course it does not mean that I’m ashamed of my status as foreigner or try to become Anglicized Estonian [...] Simply, you need to have some common interests or ‘history’”* (QUEST, 03/07); *“Perhaps I had this complex at the beginning. But it is starting to... I think now my personality matters more than my ethnic background or something”* (INT2, 04/07). She is starting to feel comfortable in her new context, she knows people and others know her and in the midst of these experiences her being Eastern-European loses its criticality: *“I am starting to make fun of it. For example, someone asked me, what you will do if you don’t find any funding. Do you become a prostitute? [incomprehensible] [I told him that] I presumed you knew that I already was. I don’t get upset about this anymore”* (INT3, 10/07).

8.7.4 Summary

R.’s case is interesting from the point of view of conceptualizing the external pressures to a person’s identity negotiations. The issue of Eastern-Europeaness is not forced on R. by her new experiences. She already uses that identity to think about herself. However, her picture of herself as Eastern-European is somewhat different from the image the collective culture has about the same social category. R.’s case reveals how the semiotic auto-regulation is used in the process of

turning a negative collective representation into a positive personal one. Even more it allows seeing how one uses one's active agency to influence the collective meaning through externalizing one's personal sense.

R.'s case also brings out the importance of the imagined other in the personal sense-making. The imagined other, 'English' or 'native-speakers' are often present in R.'s talk. They function as a mirror to assess the self or 'us'. This case also allows seeing how the difference between self and other becomes blurred and the other becomes part of the self in the course of one's life events.

8.8 The case of T.

8.8.1 Background

At the outset of the study T. is 19 years old. She comes from a small town in the North-East of Estonia, from the region that has the highest proportion of Russian inhabitants. T. comes from a Russian family. Both of her parents were born in Estonia, but are Russians by ethnicity. At home T. speaks Russian with her parents and younger brother. However, she has attended the only Estonian school in town and therefore is fluent in Estonian.

T. was a very good student in high school. She graduated with the silver medal, the second highest graduation grade in the Estonian education system. After some struggles in finding a suitable subject, T. decides to start studying engineering at the university. She chooses a well-known university in one of the Midland's biggest cities. Before starting her undergraduate studies in the UK, she had never lived away from home and never visited the UK. However, the summer before starting her studies, she lived and worked as an *au pair* in Ireland.

8.8.2 Timeline analysis

The analysis reveals four main themes with related sub-themes in T.'s case that are re-occurring throughout the study period (see Table 8.8.2). These themes are:

1. Adult in England, child in Estonia:
 - I am responsible adult in England, but can still be child at home
 - Financial difficulties
 - Stress, fatigue and insecurity related to work
 - Home as a safe place to rest
2. Open-minded, but responsible me
 - Mother as a moral anchor
 - Church as an important part of my life
 - Conservative vs. open-minded and responsible me
3. I take my relationships more easily now:
 - Friends in Estonia and in England
 - Old and new boyfriend
4. I am a Russian from Estonia

Timeline analysis shows that all these major themes occur throughout the study period. In relation to the sub-themes, the March/April period seems to be the time when the stress and fatigue related to work is the most evident, and the related desire to go home and rest emerges. The topic of ethnicity occurs throughout the study period, but it has to be kept in mind that this may be due to the fact that the issues of ethno-cultural identity were initially focused on.

T.'s answers to the sentence completion exercise reveal her differing feelings and attitudes towards Estonians as a nation and towards Estonia as a country (see Appendix E, Table E8). She is relatively critical towards Estonians. While she seems to value their strong sense of ethnicity and national pride to a certain extent, as a Russian she cannot relate to that completely positively. Her answers show that she distinguishes herself from Estonians; she is not part of 'them'. She is a Russian and therefore sensitive towards the Estonian-Russian tensions. This is especially evident in her answers during and after the April 2007 events in Tallinn and North-East Estonia. These somewhat ambivalent feelings

towards Estonians are in contrast with her clearly positive feelings towards Estonia. This is her homeland; the place where she belongs and cares about. Hence, T.'s answers are in accordance with her self-definition "I am a Russian from Estonia".

Table 8.8.2 T. – Timeline analysis

	Sept. 2006 INT	Oct. 2006 QUEST	Nov. 2006 QUEST	Jan. 2006 (begin.) QUEST	Jan. 2007 (end) QUEST	March 2007 (begin.) QUEST	March 2007 (end) QUEST	April 2007 INT	May 2007 QUEST	July 2007 QUEST	Aug. 2007 QUEST	Sept. 2007 INT
Adult in England, child at home												
Responsible adult in England, a child in Estonia							x	x		x	x	x
Financial difficulties	x	x	x				x	x			x	x
Stress, fatigue and insecurity related to work			x			x	x	x				x
Home as a safe place to rest				x	x	x	x	x				
Open-minded, but responsible me												
Mother as the moral anchor	x							x				x
Church as an important part of my life		x	x	x		x		x				x
Conservative vs. open-minded me								x				x
I take my relationships more easily now												
Friends in Estonia and in England			x				x	x	x	x		x
Old and new boyfriend	x							x				x
I am a Russian from Estonia	x					x	x	x			x	x

8.8.3 Thematic analysis

8.8.3.1 Responsible adult in England, a child in Estonia

T. starts her undergraduate studies without any scholarship that would give her financial security for the entire study period. Her family is not in the position to support her financially and therefore she needs to find a part-time job to cover her living expenses. However, finding a job turns out to be somewhat more difficult than anticipated: *"This month was quite difficult for me... because sometimes I was strangely depressed, because I wasn't able to find a job for a long while... and I like it here... I get used to the life here more and more and actually there are so many interesting people around me who I like to communicate with"*

(QUEST, 11/06); *“The beginning was very positive, I came here and all those new people and especially the first week. That was really interesting and I liked. [...] And then the next month was like... I didn’t have a job; the money that I’d earned in the summer was starting to end. [...] It was really, well, a lot of worrying and insecurity”* (INT3, 09/07). T.’s feelings in the first months are fluctuating between excitement related to the new way of living and worries caused by the financial difficulties. These inner worries are increased by the dialogue with her father, who, being worried of her daughter and not being able to support her, suggests to return home: *“Well, in the beginning when I came here, I didn’t have, I wasn’t able to find a job and then my father told me that why did you go there in the first place! Did you think it was going to be easy!”* (INT2, 04/07). The everyday life experiences (e.g. “I like it here”, “I have to find a job to be able to stay here” etc.) and the dialogues with the others (e.g. “If you don’t find a job, you have to return”) make T. search for some sense of stability and continuity in herself that would help to deal with this uncertain situation (see Figure 8.8.3.1). She finds this feeling of continuity in the self-understandings that she has constructed about herself: *“When my father told me at some point that you have to return if you cannot find the job, I said, why are you saying those things, you know perfectly that I’m not coming back, I will find a way or I don’t know”* (INT2, 04/07); *“At some point I thought, well, what will I do if it gets very difficult, perhaps I can’t do it. But nobody said that it has to be always easy. I am used to this, I like it. When things go too easily then I become lazy and don’t work anymore or something”* (INT2, 04/07). These self-understandings as generalized metasigns (e.g. “Challenges motivate me”, “I am not the person who gives up easily”) help to relate the difficult present in a meaningful manner with the past and through that provide a positive input for the movement into the unknown future (e.g. “I’ve managed difficulties before, I’ll be fine this time too”). In addition to these self-understandings T. uses others’ voices to deal with her insecurities: *“My mother has always been supportive [...] My father, he felt obliged to support me financially [...] Mother was a bit calmer [...] Saying, don’t worry. I got more support from my mother”* (INT2, 04/07); *“A girl from my course helped me out quite a bit. [...] She said, oh, don’t worry, everything is okay. Don’t start to think*

about all sorts of things. You can do it!" (INT2, 04/07). The confirmation from the others to her self-understandings helps to manage the tension and move on.

Being pushed by her achievement orientation T. soon manages to find two jobs that give her the possibility to make ends meet. Her life in England becomes a life of a responsible and independent grown-up: *"This hard-working [a word from the self-description exercise], it has more meaning now, now I actually do work. And I could also add that I am more responsible now. I have so many... and more independent. [...] I have always been quite independent [...] but now I have to also earn my living. Perhaps I don't even realize yet how independent I actually am"* (INT3, 09/07). However, this new independent life that is filled with studying and working brings along new tensions: *"This month has been quite crazy ☺... In the sense that I had many things to do at school, plus the work... I didn't have any spare time... this period was quite stressful"* (QUEST, 03/07). In the midst of this stress-laden period T. dreams of home as a place where she can finally rest and relax: *"I bought my tickets to home... to go home in the end of March and I cannot wait to go... [...] Since I returned, I have been to the classes every day and then at work during the weekends and sometimes also in the evenings... and I am a bit tired... [...] and then HOME... TO REST!!!"* (QUEST, 03/07); *"It is so nice to rest at home... when mother is always close... and cooks... and is very, very NICE with me!!!☺"* (QUEST, 01/07). Home becomes for her a safe place where she can forget about her worries in England. It is a place where she does not have to be an independent grown-up and can just enjoy being a child again: *"For me it is simply the time when I don't have to think about the university, work, cooking, finances... I just want my parents to take care of me once again for a while ☺"* (QUEST, 03/07); *"A lot of positive time is related to my being at home. It was like every time I had, something negative happened, I went home and things turned positive again. [...] Sometimes I just get tired of studying and everything, working. Then I need to go somewhere for a change. Home"* (life-trajectory drawing task, INT3, 09/07). T. seems to feel comfortable and secure in the role of independent grown-up, and home, as a place where she can be a child again, is not a threat to her independence, but rather is seen as a safe haven (see N.'s case for comparison). New metasigns become constructed:

“Home is a safe place to rest” and “At home I don’t have to worry about anything”. These help to reduce the tension and deal with stress-laden periods; there is something to strive towards. The stress becomes more manageable, it is no longer an overwhelming feeling, but a period that has an end – it ends, when T. can finally go home.

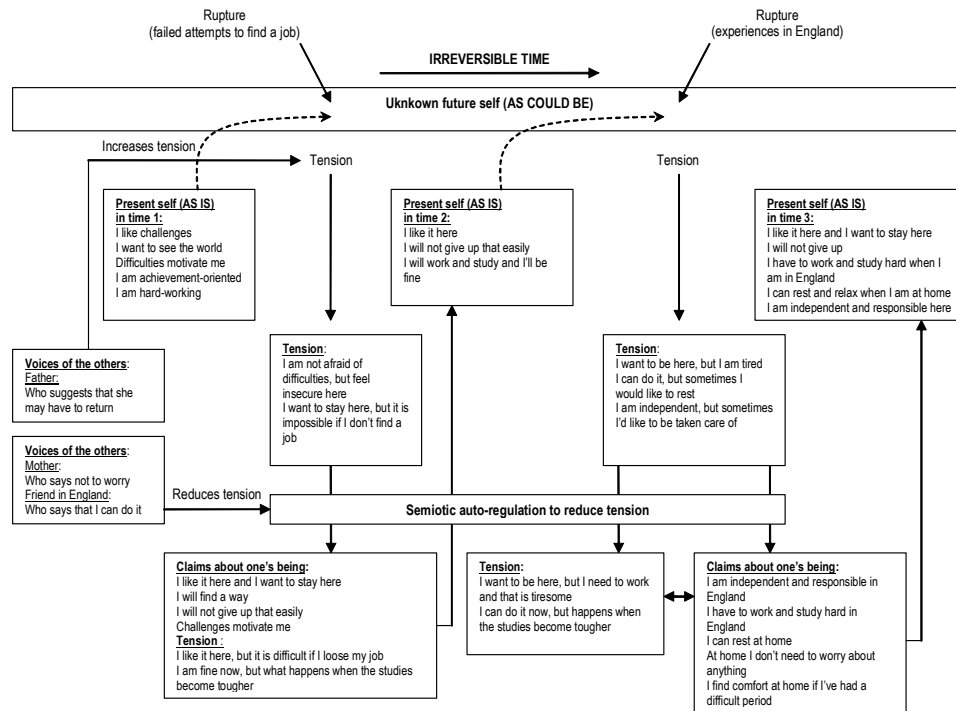


Figure 8.8.3.1 T. – Adult in England, child in Estonia

8.8.3.2 Open-minded, but responsible me

The move to England creates a rupture in T.’s usual way of being and she needs to make sense of this new way of living. She recalls her life at home as a life of a calm and well-educated girl, who went to church with her mother every Sunday. The life in England is very different. It is full of parties, meeting new people, smoking, drinking – all the things that T.’s previous life did not include, and therefore she needs to figure out how to relate to these new experiences: *“I’ve been before quite conservative in everything, in behaviour and everything. When I came here, I started to... All these people that surround you, they take things very*

easily... If there is a party, then it is a party, if we drink, then we drink, that kind of things... And I feel I've started to take things more easily as well. I'm not sure yet, if it is right or wrong. Sometimes I feel guilty. How come? Before I would've never had parties like this or something. But now it's like... Sometimes I don't know what's happening to me" (INT2, 04/07); *"Initially I thought, I'd come here and I'd study and work and behave very properly and this kind of things. Now it's like, I even see myself that sometimes I feel guilty. But then you start to think that we have a nice company, friends, why not go out, to some party or something"* (INT2, 04/07). Her feelings in relation to this new way of living are fluctuating (see Figure 8.8.3.2). On the one hand, she enjoys being free and open-minded, living the life of a student. On the other hand, it is against everything her mother and church has taught her and therefore she sometimes feels guilty. The mother is an important dialogue partner in T.'s inner discussions. She seems to be the moral anchor for T., who represents the right and good way of living, and she does not want to disappoint her: *"When I went to church in Estonia together with my mum. My mother doesn't drink or smoke or anything like that [...] When I came here I'm more free and I can't tell my mother all the things that I do here because I know she would, it has a bad influence, and I know she would be very worried. That if I feel myself that it is not that big of a threat. But sometimes I do think what if my mother knew or something like that"* (INT2, 04/07). T. tries to regulate her feelings of doubt, guilt and shame by constructing a sign "Telling mother about my experiences, will hurt her". In this way she is protecting her mother from worrying too much and that helps to reduce the anxiety and conflicting feelings. Her relationship with the church also changes: *"That church where I used to go...When I came here I really wanted to go there. But now I notice that I take the church more easily too. It starts to fade to the background, all the things my mother taught me. I do go to the church still, but it's a bit different. I have friends there now and so on. But sometimes I feel strange that I go to the church in a different way"* (INT2, 04/07). T. notices a change in her behaviour, but is not sure how to relate to this change. On the one hand, she seems to be drawn to the idea of taking it more easily, but on the other hand, the teaching of the church and of her mother is still very important.

In this movement from conservative to open-minded person, T. is also in dialogue with other people around her. The main dialogue partners are her friends from England: *"It has never been difficult for me to resist, now it is not difficult either. But sometimes, now I say like this, that sometimes I want to drink something and I go and buy. It is a bit surprising though, because before I would've never...Like, if I once said that I will not, then I will never do it. But now when I'm here and I sometimes feel like drinking or something... But I don't like people putting pressure on me. If somebody starts to push me, then I'll definitely say no, even if I actually would like to"* (INT2, 04/07); *"I feel freer here. I know that I have certain limits within me, that if I do something, then I do them... I know myself. But still, that I allow the environment to influence me so drastically. I say, I am as I am and actually I don't care what other people think of me. Sometimes I even say it out loud, why do you want to change me. I like the way I am and that's how I am"* (INT2, 04/07). T. is struggling with the idea that others have influenced her thinking and behaviour. She is using others' reactions to evaluate her new way of being: *"Also my friend who was visiting me here from Estonia, said oh, you have changed so much [...] That you take it, that you are not so conservative anymore. She didn't say anything, whether it was good or bad"* (INT2, 04/07). She is not sure if this new way of being is good or bad and whether this should become part of her self-understanding and way of living.

In the search for this clarity she finds it important to differentiate herself from the lifestyle of the other students: *"I always know what I'm doing and I somehow have this self-confidence that I can, I don't know, control myself. [...] It's not like I've forgotten all my previous principles. Came here and now I do what I feel. Freedom! Freedom! I don't feel like now I'm so... I notice that many of those people with whom I live, when they come here, they say it is so good, the parents are far away, I can do what I want. This kind of childish attitude. I don't see this kind of attitude in myself"* (INT2, 04/07). Even though she has started to behave to a certain extent like them, she is not like them after all. She can be more open-minded and less conservative, but she does not have to give up her values. Differently from others, she has her boundaries within which she allows herself to be free and open-minded. This connects her to her old way of being in Estonia,

relates her to the moral teaching of her mother and the church, hence offering a sense of stability and continuity.

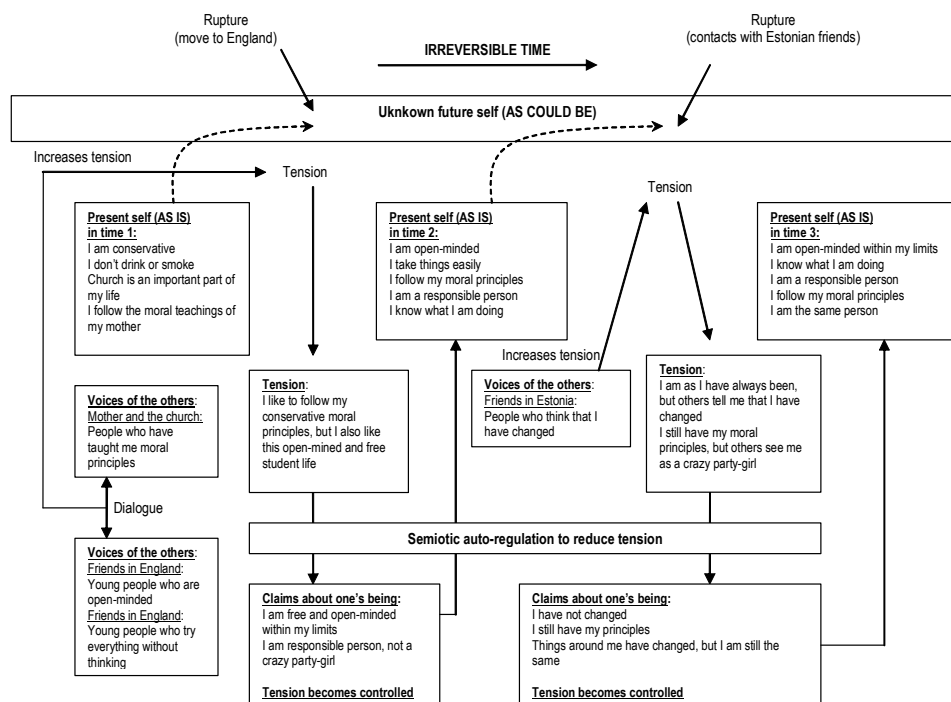


Figure 8.8.3.2 T. – Open-minded, but responsible me

By referring to her deeply rooted values and boundaries within which she acts as an open-minded, but responsible person, T. creates a new status quo after a period of self-search exemplified by fluctuating feelings and questions about herself. After finding this balance, the questions of identity lose their relevance. This is just the way she is in this new context and she does not find it necessary to question whether it is the same or a different way of being: *“I don’t even like it when my friends say that, especially that one friend who visited me here; they say that I’ve changed so much and so on. I don’t feel that I’ve changed so much. Yes, my environment has changed, people around me, I have new friends, I am in the university now, it is not a high school anymore, I don’t live with my parents, I cook for myself, I work. Yes, this is what has changed. But inside, I don’t feel that I’m a completely different person now. I’m still the same,*

just the things around me have changed, the work and everything, I have more responsibilities now” (INT3, 09/07).

8.8.3.3 I take my relationships more easily now

The move to England brings along a change in T.’s social relations. As the time passes the contacts with friends from Estonia become less frequent and the friends from England become more and more important: *“I also stay in touch with my best friend... We talk once a week or so... And then sometimes I chat with my friends in the MSN, but only if I have time...I don’t have much time now, because now I have friends also here with who I spend my time... I cannot be tied to the computer all the time... it is a bit sad, that I cannot talk to the people with whom I was so close in the last years that often anymore” (QUEST, 11/07).* There is a period where she feels to be in-between – the old relationships do not have the same feel anymore and the new ones have not become that strong yet (see Figure 8.8.3.3): *“Now it is this kind of period, when these old friends are becoming... you think to call, but then you think, well, why she hasn’t called me or... here these relationships are not that strong yet, I am not sure if they actually care about my problems” (INT2, 04/07).* She feels disappointed that her Estonian friends do not keep in touch with her: *“I have my studies and my work, I’m always busy, I didn’t have time to keep in touch and then I started thinking, well, why I have to be the one writing to everybody” (INT2, 04/07).* In the process of dealing with this feeling of disappointment T. starts to reconsider her relationships in Estonia: *“But I have couple of friends with whom it is like this [...] we met couple of times [...] but all the others, when I see them, I ask how they are doing, but it is not like, let’s get together or something. [...] Well, I think it is okay. If they don’t contact me when I am back, then I don’t want to push it either. So there are some people with whom I studies, but we go on in different routes in life” (INT3, 09/07).* The couple of good friends, who have remained in her life, create a sense of stability and continuity from her previous life to the current one. At the same time the new friends with whom she has shared many new life experiences offer a bridge to move forward into the future.

Similar transformations take place in T.’s personal meaning space also

in relation to her love affairs. She breaks up with her boyfriend when she moves to England. However, he is still an important person in her life and they continue communicating via emails. She reconsiders their relationship as friendship and seems to be content with that: *“When I was there in the winter, then we met and we talked, but somehow I felt that we are just friends and it is better this way”* (INT2, 04/07). However, this *status quo* is disturbed by the news that the ex-boyfriend is seeing somebody else. This creates confusion and tension: *“I felt so strange, because I thought I should’ve been the first person he told this, why didn’t he tell me [...] Anyway, when I go home in the summer, I want to see him and make things clear. I cannot just leave things unfinished like this”* (INT2, 04/07). However, when looking back to her reactions later T. says: *“I’ve started to see this situation differently [...] I reacted somewhat childishly or something like, why he didn’t tell me and blablablaa. When I was at home now, then I felt that we are friends and that is easier and better for us now”* (INT3, 09/07). The situation is reconsidered and balance is achieved through new metasigns: *“I am smarter now”, “I am more mature now”, “It is better for us to be friends”*. The experience in the past that caused inner tension is related in a personally meaningful way to the present situation. The two separate episodes with two different reactions are connected to each other on the level of meaning, creating a sense of continuity in the flow of ever-changing everyday experiences and the unique reactions to them.

Similar sense-making processes are evident also in the case of T.’s experiences with her new boyfriend. Their relationship develops from friendship to *“something more than friends”* (INT2, 04/07). However, T. is not sure how exactly she feels about this affair: *“This relationship is different, compared to what I had before. I just feel that I am not taking the relationship that I have now so seriously. It is more like a friendship, but I am not sure yet. We have started to build this relationship, but I don’t know yet, where it will take us. [...]. But still I am not yet [incomprehensible] my feelings or what I expect of this relationship. I am taking it very easy”* (INT2, 04/07).

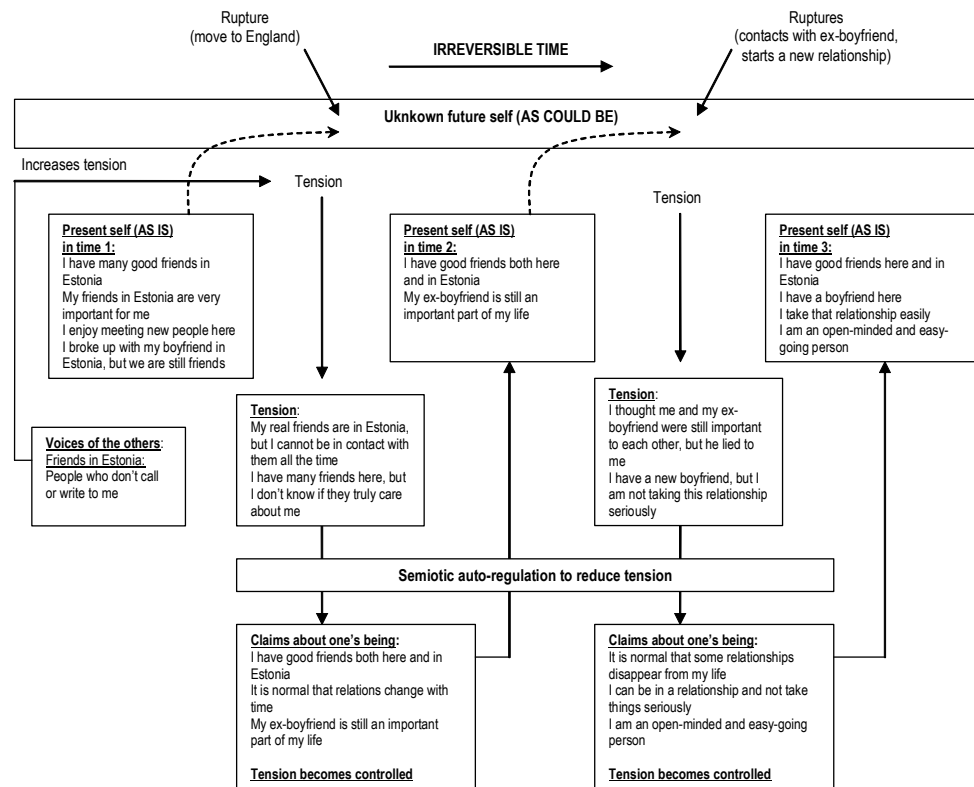


Figure 8.8.3.3 T. – I take my relationships more easily now

On the one hand, the idea that she is “taking this relationship very easy” is new to her: “*Before I wouldn’t have even considered a relationship of this kind. Before the things were much more serious. I’d never have thought that I’d have a relationship of this kind, that even I don’t take it very seriously*” (INT2, 04/07). This new experience does not fit into the old picture T. has about herself. However, this new way of seeing her relationships is consistent with her new way of being a more open-minded person. It allows making sense of this experience. These reactions to different separate life experiences become connected and feed into the construction of a metasign “I am an open-minded person”. At the same time this metasign is used in the next moment to make sense of the situation, creating therefore a cycle that feeds forward into the future and functions as a filter through which to interpret one’s experiences: “*I don’t know, I take things more easily now. We will see what the future brings*” (INT3, 09/07).

8.8.3.4 I am a Russian from Estonia

T. sees herself as a Russian by ethnicity, but finds it always important to emphasize that she is not a real Russian, because she was born in Estonia: *“Above all I feel that I’m Russian. We speak Russian at home and my parents are Russians. Perhaps this is the way they have educated me, that firstly you are Russian. Grandma and granddad came from Russia [...] And then mom and dad were born here and me... [...] Somehow it’s like this, that first of all I’m a Russian. But Estonian, perhaps in this sense that I don’t consider myself Estonian by nationality, but I was born in Estonia and Estonia is still my homeland and it is very important for me. This language and everything is also part of me. I can’t just say that I am Russian and that’s it”* (INT1, 09/06). Having been born in Estonia during a period where the relations between Estonians and Russians were tense, T. has come to respect both sides of her ethno-cultural background – she is in-between, being “a Russian from Estonia”. This is the metasign she has constructed that has helped her to deal with the tension coming from imagined and real dialogues with Estonians who claim that she is not a real Estonian (see Figure 8.8.3.4). It is also the metasign that helps her to deal with the pressure from grandparents who emphasize her Russian roots: *“For example my grandparents, they perhaps even mind if I don’t say, if I say that I am a Russian from Estonia; that I am not a real Russian”* (INT3, 09/07). It seems as if the question of nationality is not important for T. when she arrives to England, she knows who she is and does not need to worry or think about it.

However, her first experience abroad brings those questions to the surface. Her experience in Ireland before arriving in the UK makes her emphasize that she is from Estonia and not from somewhere else: *“They always said that I was Polish. And I kept telling them, that I was not. [...] It hurt my feelings, it was like, how can you not remember that I’m not from Poland [...] It’s still, I don’t know, I think it does matter to the person, it is important if I’m, for example, Russian who lives in Estonia. It is important to me”* (INT1, 09/06). With the move to England the issue of ethnicity arises from another angle. Now the question is no longer about differentiating Estonia from other countries, but it is about her being “a Russian from Estonia”: *“And sometimes they didn’t understand how come I*

was born in Estonia, but still say that I am Russian” (QUEST, 03/07). The sign that functioned effectively in the Estonian context seems not to be functional in her new socio-cultural milieu, forcing T. to deal with her ‘in-between being’. Sometimes she finds herself emphasizing her Russian-ness: “Sometimes somebody makes fun that Russia is this and that; then I start to defend Russia and say bad things about their country [...] It’s not that I defend Russia. But if it’s something against Russians” (INT2, 04/07). Other times she finds it important to distance herself from Russia and emphasize her Estonian-ness: “Sometimes, when something related to Russia comes up, then I even say that I am not from Russia, I don’t know that much about Russia [...] But when they ask where I am from, then I say from Estonia, because in reality I have never had a relationship of this kind with Russia”.

On the one hand T.’s everyday experiences in England continue to support her idea of herself as “a Russian from Estonia”. She can use both of these dimensions in her self-understanding to communicate with people and build relationships. Her best friend in England is similar to her – a Russian girl from Latvia. *“Especially the girl from Latvia, with her even the way of thinking is similar. She is also not Latvian by nationality. With her I feel that very many things are similar” (INT2, 04/07). But she also enjoys contacts with Estonians: “Now I am very happy that we do keep in touch also with her [another Estonian]. I can speak Estonian [...] I visited her couple of days ago and you feel, that she is one of my people, certain topics and so on, it is easy to talk” (INT2, 04/07). On the other hand, this metasign “I am a Russian from Estonia” starts to fade to the background in T.’s everyday functioning: “When I am here in England then there are people all over the world. And people always ask, where are you from. But I don’t feel that it is that important for me now. I know that we are all very different here, but at the same time we are also equal, especially in the university” (INT3, 09/07). It seems that while initially the question about one’s ethnicity was an important sign for oneself to create a link with the past, and for others to position oneself in relation to others, with time the focus seems to shift from these ethno-cultural identities, to more interpersonal matters (e.g. “We are different but also equal here”).*

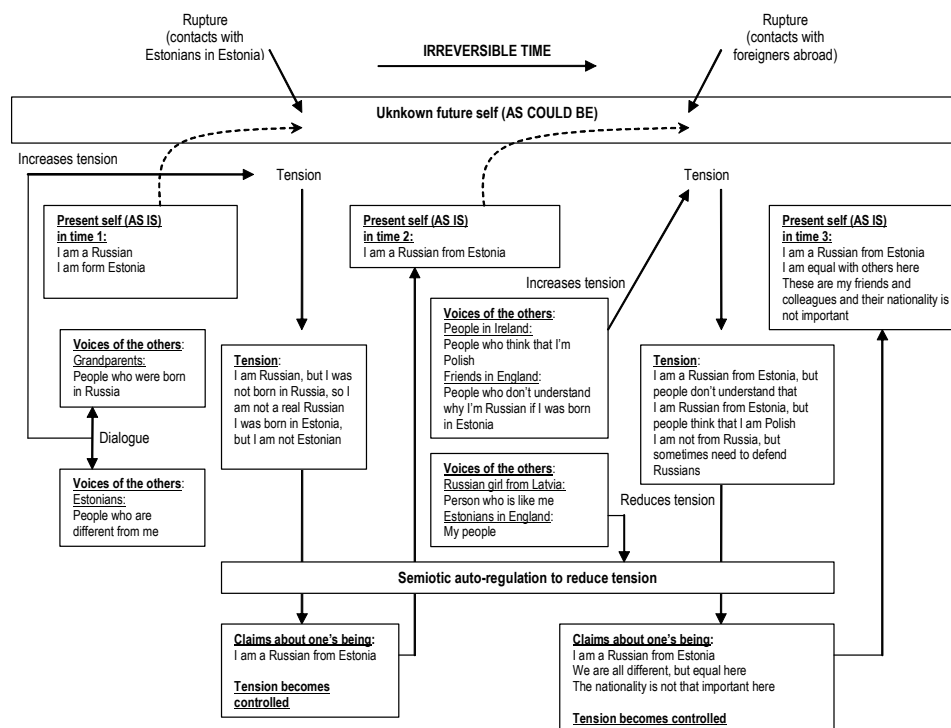


Figure 8.8.3.4 T. – I am a Russian from Estonia

8.8.4 Summary

From the model refinement perspective, T.'s case points to two issues. Firstly, the change in the socio-cultural context does not seem to cause a serious and negative rupture in her life. Even though it brings up the questions of identity and makes her redefine herself in relation to her family and friends, in terms of her life as a child or as an adult, as a good girl or as an independent-minded, but responsible woman, as well as work on her self-definition as a Russian from Estonia, the rupture seems to be more subtle and gradual. The redefinition of her being that occurs during the study period seems to be a relatively steady process and not a sudden and dramatic change. Therefore, this case offers material to further think about different types of ruptures and their impact on personal identity-construction efforts.

Secondly, T.'s case is useful also for thinking about the role of others in personal sense-making efforts. Different others have different roles in her auto-

dialogues: they are criticizing her, supporting her, they are in dialogue amongst themselves through her. Some of the dialogues take place in the present, some of the others' voices take part in present dialogues, while belonging themselves to the past. Some of these voices function to emphasize the difference between past and present, others are used as mechanisms to connect the present with the past. Hence, this case seems to point to the need for further refining the concept of the others' voices in the model in terms of their interrelations and functions in semiotic auto-regulation.

8.9 Inter-case analysis

8.9.1 Themes of personal sense-making across the cases

The inter-case analysis indicates that content-wise the life-experiences of the study participants are relatively similar. They are all, to a larger or smaller extent, dealing with the following issues during the one-year study period:

- Work, study, social life balance;
- Friendships at home and new friendships in England;
- New and old love-affairs;
- Orientation towards success and achievements, desire to prove oneself, to have a worthy study experience in England and personally rewarding and successful professional life later in life;
- Being Estonian abroad;
- Unpredictability of the future in relation to place of residence, work, studies, close relations.

While these themes are relevant for understanding the life-experiences of all the study participants, the specific ways in which these topics emerge and are dealt with differ across the eight cases. In other words, when it comes to considering the young persons' life-trajectories as these unfold during the one-year study period, there are significant differences in terms of ruptures and fluctuations that these life-experiences create.

8.9.2 Move abroad as an expected significant rupture in individuals' lives

The move abroad, i.e. changing one's socio-cultural context was thought to be a rupture in individuals' lives in the current study. This was one of the events that all the study participants were expected to perceive and interpret as a significant break in their normal flow of being. However, as the inter-case analysis reveals, the significance of this event to personal sense-making and re-configuring of one's intra-psychological system, differs across cases. It appears that this event is perceived in two different manners by participants. On the one hand, the data reveal that this change in person/environment relationship was perceived as a highly positive event in case of H., E., L., N. and T. In these cases the new socio-cultural context was seen as an enabling and affording, as a space that allows the persons to become and be who they want to become and be. Therefore, the personal meaning field is eagerly modified in order to respond to these positively perceived and increased affordances. On the other hand, for A., P. and R. the move to England does not cause a strong, sudden and positive rupture, but rather is seen as an event that brings some new themes to the surface of one's awareness and creates a lingering tension within the self-system, but does not lead to a re-configuration of the intra-psychological field. While the change in socio-cultural context is still seen in a positive light, and the new environment is seen as enabling, the effect this change has to personal sense-making is less intense. In interpreting these two types it seems significant that the younger participants of the study (19 to 23 years old) fall into the first type, while the older participants (25 and 31 years old) fall into the second type.

However, it has to be kept in mind that while this kind of difference in perception and resulting sense-making efforts is clearly evident in case of H., E., T. (strong, positive rupture), P. and R. (lingering tension), this interpretation has to be considered somewhat more cautiously in case of A., L. and N. These three individuals had already lived in England for some time by the time the current study started. While their retrospective accounts seem to indicate this kind of interpretation of their first experiences in the new socio-cultural context, it needs to be regarded with some care. This has to be kept in mind also in relation to the

life-trajectories that the participants were asked to draw as part of the life-trajectory drawing exercise (presented in Appendix F). While the drawing of other participants seem to be in accordance with the current analysis, the drawing of A., N., and L. cannot be used to triangulate this analysis, as they refer to the year of the study and not to their first year in England.

8.9.3 Other events as significant ruptures in study participants' lives

The classification of life events as causing a strong sudden rupture that leads to re-configuring of the self-system or as causing a lingering tension within the intrapsychological field, can be applied also to other events in study participants lives. The events that were considered to belong to those two types are presented in Table 8.9.3. In addition to indicating whether the rupture was perceived as a sudden and re-structuring or whether it caused a more lingering tension, it is pointed out whether the rupture was positive or negative, where possible. Importantly, the events in participants' lives that had not yet happened, but which were anticipated, and therefore influenced their sense-making efforts in significant ways, are also included to the following list.

Table 8.9.3 Life-events as ruptures in study-participants' lives

Case	Life-event	Type of rupture
A.	Starts a new relationship	Sudden and re-structuring rupture (positive)
	Best friends get married and become parents	Lingering tension within the self-system
	Visits to Estonia	Lingering tension within the self-system
	Anticipated return to Estonia	Lingering tension within the self-system
E.	Graduation from the high-school	Sudden and re-structuring rupture
	Visits to Estonia	Sudden and re-structuring rupture (negative)
	Finds a new job and an apartment	Sudden and re-structuring rupture (positive)
H.	Return to Estonia	Sudden and re-structuring rupture (negative)
	Starts a relationship	Sudden and re-structuring rupture (positive)
	Breaks up with the boy-friend	Sudden and re-structuring rupture (negative))
	Finds out boyfriend lied	Sudden and re-structuring rupture (negative)
	Continues the relationship with ex-boyfriend	Sudden and re-structuring rupture (positive)

Table 8.9.3 (continued) Life-events as ruptures in study-participants' lives

Case	Life-event	Type of rupture
L.	Visit to France	Lingering tension within the self-system
	Breaks up with the boyfriend	Sudden and re-structuring rupture (negative)
	Starts a new relationship	Sudden and re-structuring rupture (positive)
N.	Graduation from the high-school	Sudden and re-structuring rupture
	Move to London and starting the university	Sudden and re-structuring rupture (positive)
	Anticipated end of the B.A. programme	Lingering tension within the self-system
	Visit to Estonia	Lingering tension within the self-system
	Visits to home (where parents live)	Lingering tension within the self-system
P.	Negative feedback to her performance	Sudden and re-structuring rupture (negative)
	Anticipated end of the M.A. programme	Lingering tension within the self-system
	Anticipated move to the world of work in England	Lingering tension within the self-system
	Starts a new relationship	Sudden and re-structuring rupture (positive)
	Finds out the sister changed her first name	Sudden and re-structuring rupture (negative)
	Finds out about the April 2007 events in Tallinn	Lingering tension within the self-system
R.	Initial negative feedback to her performance	Lingering tension within the self-system
	Acceptance to the Ph.D. programme and positive feedback to her performance	Sudden and re-structuring rupture (positive)
	Anticipated need to return to Estonia	Lingering tension within the self-system
	Decides to stay in England despite of the lack of finances	Sudden and re-structuring rupture (positive)
	Being away from the sister and friends	Lingering tension within the self-system
	Conflict with a young man from her course	Sudden and re-structuring rupture (negative)
	Finds out about the April 2007 events in Tallinn	Lingering tension within the self-system
T.	Anticipated and experienced difficulties with balancing between work and studies	Lingering tension within the self-system
	Finds and loses jobs	Sudden and re-structuring rupture (positive and negative respectively)
	Parties with new friends in England	Sudden and re-structuring ruptures
	Contacts with friends and ex-boyfriend from Estonia	Lingering tension within the self-system
	Starts a new relationship	Sudden and re-structuring ruptures (positive)

In addition to these two categories, the data seem to indicate a third type of rupture. In this case the rupture is sudden and strong, but it does not lead to the re-configuration of the self-system. This type appears in case of R. in relation to the somewhat negative feedback to her last essays (see section 8.7.3.1 in this chapter for details). R.'s text reveals that while the low marks she received, caused tension and anxiety, she attributed her failures to the external factors and not personally to her core being (e.g., three essays is too much in such a short period). Hence, this life-event, receiving negative feedback about one's performance, has the potential to create a serious negative rupture in R.'s normal flow of being (see P.'s case in relation to negative feedback, section 8.6.3.1 in this chapter). However, this possible outcome is blocked by semiotic auto-regulation. The situation is interpreted as something that influences R.'s way of being in that particular context, but does not have a serious effect on her self-system.

This kind of rupture, that creates a short-term strong tension within the self-system, but does not lead to the re-structuring of the self-system, is evident also in case of T. in relation to her changing jobs during the first year. Losing her job is a sudden unpleasant life-event, which causes stress and anxiety by reminding T. in important ways that her possibility of staying in England depends on her ability to work. However, it does not lead to the re-structuring of the self-system, but rather has a short-term effect that fades into the background once new job opportunities become available. Similarly, E.'s experiences with starting a new job or moving to a new accommodation can be seen as sudden positive ruptures, which create strong positive feelings for a short period, but do not lead to the re-considering of one's way of being.

8.10 Summary

The current chapter has given a detailed overview of the data analysis as it was carried out in the current research project. The main part of the chapter concentrated on the description of individual cases. Each individual case was portrayed through the analysis of sense-making episodes, which concentrated on specific themes. The intra-case analysis gave a detailed picture of the ways in

which people use semiotic auto-regulation in order to create a sense of sameness and continuity across space and time context.

In the final part of the chapter the trajectories of each individual case were explored in order to bring out the cross-case patterns. On the one hand, the inter-case analysis showed that, while the issues with which the young people had to deal with during the study period were relatively similar, the effects these experiences had on their lives and their personal sense-making (i.e. identity construction), differed in some ways. On the other hand, the analysis showed that certain similarities are evident across cases when the life-trajectories of the individuals are considered using the idea of life-events as ruptures, which have a potential to open up different future trajectories and can lead to the re-configuration of the self-system.

CHAPTER 9

EXTENSIONS OF THE MODEL

The model of identity construction developed in the current dissertation is meant to be universalistic. It is not designed to explain the processes of identity construction only in the case of Estonian students studying in the UK. While these particular case studies have been the basis of model development and refinement, they serve only as one example of the application of this conceptualization. It is suggested that the same model can be used for understanding identity construction as an episodic steady state of subjective sense of sameness and continuity also in other time and space contexts. In order to show the applicability of this model to other cases, two examples will be briefly discussed in this chapter. First, the French schoolgirls' headscarf affair as an instance of identity construction will be discussed. Second, the questions about Indian identity as it is experienced by Indians living in the United States, will be examined.

9.1 French schoolgirls' headscarves as symbols of Islam identity

Since the last decade of the 20th century, the French schoolgirls' headscarf-wearing has caused uproar and debate on the French national arena, as well as internationally. This controversial issue led to the passing of the law in 2004 that

forbid the usage of ostentatious religious signs, including Muslim headscarves, in public schools. This notorious affair offers an interesting example for analysing the identity construction processes using the model proposed in the current research project. The following discussion is based on John Bowen's (2007) historically and ethnographically oriented account of the headscarf issue.

Why do Muslim women wear headscarves? First, it is an item of clothing and can be worn as such. Second, as any item of clothing it can be turned into a religious or any other kind of symbol. Bowen's interviews with young Muslim women indeed show that the personal reasons for wearing or not wearing a headscarf (or *voile* to use the French word that Bowen prefers) differ widely. While the reasons for wearing a headscarf are usually related to one's explorations within the Islam religion, some women are clearly opposed to the idea, that *voile* is a religious sign as such, but see it rather as a part of one's way of being and practicing Islam. While some Muslim women feel "naked" without a headscarf, Bowen's interviews also show that wearing a headscarf can in some cases also be a passing phase in one's life: the person in search for a sense in one's life, turns to Islam, reads the Qur'ân, memorizes the prayer, but returns to one's previous way of being after a while. To illustrate this, Bowen uses the example of a young Muslim woman who turned to Islam after her father died, but returned to her previous ways of living after a while. In this case trying out 'Muslim identity' remains an ordinary reaction to one's unique life-experiences. It is related to other experiences and therefore can be used trans-contextually. It is something to remember and talk about, even regret of losing, but it does not reach the level of generalization where it starts to guide and regulate one's life. It is a way of making sense of one's being in a particular moment in time. It functions as a temporarily fixed understanding of oneself that provides a sense of coherence and sameness, but fades to the background in the flow of new subjective life-experiences.

In this sense, wearing a headscarf is like wearing any other item of clothing. Some Western people wear black clothes when mourning someone. This symbolic act helps to deal with this painful period in one's life, and is therefore

considered as part of one's normal way of being that is not questioned or paid special attention to. Similarly, some women wear skirts, while others never do. For some women it is a symbol of femininity, for others simply a way of bringing some variety into one's wardrobe. To take this parallel further, while women's skirt-wearing does not usually imply an additional layer of meanings, men's use of skirts, or kilts as these are usually called in those instances, carries with it certain (ethno-cultural) ideas and personal meanings. Yet again, these ways of responding to one's emerging life-experiences are considered to be normal, even if sometimes unusual or even funny.

Taking this into account, it is interesting to see, how French schoolgirls' headscarves suddenly became an important affair in 1989 and has remained a serious social issue in France ever since. It is something about the space and time context, that turned an insignificant act of coming to school wearing a *voile*, into a significant rupture in the lives of those girls, that made them consider their Muslim-ness in important ways. Bowen describes this moment in space and time as follows: "International 'political Islam' appeared on the magazine covers in the form of Iranian women in Islamic dress, adding another dimension to scarves in French schools. The conjuncture of domestic and foreign threats made scarf-wearing into a national 'affair'" (Bowen, 2007, p. 83).

The model proposed in the current research project enables us to see this moment in time and space as a rupture that creates tension within the self-system and initiates a dialogue between different internal and external, real and imagined voices. Simple personal reaction to one's life-experiences, wearing a headscarf one day at school, becomes accentuated by the voices of the others: the teachers, the principle, other students, parents, friends, and mass-media. The significance that is attached to that act from the outside brings together other experiences with oneself and with one's being in the world: "*Voile* shows my affiliation with God"; "Wearing a *voile* is nobody's business, it is between me and God"; "*Voile* is a symbol of Islam"; "Islam=terrorism"; "I am not a terrorist, but I want to wear *voile*"; "I was born in France, I speak only French, so I am French"; "Other students see me as different" etc. All these different voices that become

“audible” due to a rupture bring the questions about one’s identity on the surface of one’s consciousness. These questions need to be answered and the tension they create has to be resolved. The dialogues between those voices feed into a possible construction of a highly generalized and personally defining subjective sign that has a potential of starting to guide one’s life (e.g. “Above all I am a Muslim woman”). An ordinary sense-making episode escalates into a construction of new self-defining identity as a result of external pressure.

The material presented in Bowen’s book does not enable us to see, how the French schoolgirls who happened to be in the centre of the headscarves scandal resolved the tensions within the intra-psychological field. Nevertheless, the model proposed in the current dissertation enables us to see how a simple act of scarf-wearing may become an important trigger in constructing a certain identity as an episodic steady state of the sense of sameness and continuity in the flow of everyday experiences with the potential to guide one’s life in a very general and significant manner.

9.2 “When do you go back home?”: Creating Indian identity in America

The second example of the model extension is related to the Indian diaspora in the United States (US). With more than 25 million Indians living in 110 different countries in the world, Indian diaspora is one of the largest in the world (Brosius & Yazgi, 2007). According to Bhatia (2007), the Indian diaspora in the United States was formed by many waves of arrivals and departures. The lived experiences of the immigrant Indians differ widely in function of the socio-cultural and economic circumstances of their departures and arrivals. In the current miniature glimpse into that wide field of research, the experiences of these Indians who belong to the post-1965 migration wave will be considered. This generation of Indians moved to America, to the “land of opportunity” (Bhatia, 2007, p. 96) in search of a better life. They came to the country as students and stayed to build their professional careers in highly-skilled sectors such as engineering, computer sciences, medicine, etc. For them moving to America was a route to success, a way of “making it big” (Brosius & Yazgi, 2007) – a collective

image so clearly illustrated also by Kiran Desai's (2006) recent award-winning novel. The fact that many of those Non-Resident Indians (NRI) have become successful and influential abroad and are interested also in the economic growth of their homeland, has changed the general perception of the NRI-s (Brosius & Yazgi, 2007). The Indian living abroad is not anymore seen as a deserter of the homeland, but rather as a superior human, who has made it in the West, while maintaining tight contacts with the homeland and its culture. Bhatia's investigation looks into the life-experiences of these members of Indian diaspora.

The current small illustration of the model use focuses on the experiences of one of Bhatia's study participants. Rani is a professional Indian woman who went to America in 1970s to study, and stayed there in order to build a successful professional career. For Rani it is important to emphasise that she did not go to the United States as "somebody's wife or somebody's daughter" but instead she went there as "a pioneering Indian woman to study" (Bhatia, 2007, p. 119). The decision to move to America was a progressive and conscious decision of this independent woman. While, she does go back to India every once in a while, especially when she feels lost and needs to find an emotional balance again, overall she sees her life unfolding now in America. However, when asked to recall an episode that made her feel "unwelcome" in the US as an Indian immigrant, Rani mentions a question that her friends and neighbours often ask her: "When are you going back home?".

According to the model proposed in the current research project this simple question can be seen as a rupture in person's normal flow of being. It is a life-event that brings the questions of identity to the surface of one's awareness. Where is home? Where should she return? To India? But is India still home after all these years, after all these ways of distancing herself from it and without the intent to return? Does she still have to feel that India is her home? Or is America, where she will never be allowed to forget about her otherness, home for Rani now? Where does she belong? Who is she?

From identity construction point of view it is interesting to think why Rani feels "unwelcome" when asked this question. For others this may be just

another question that people ask each other every now and then. But for Rani it is a question that does not allow her to forget that she is a foreigner. Clearly this small incident in Rani's life needs to be considered in connection with her other life-experiences. Bhatia's study sheds light to some of these. Take for example the time when Rani's supervisor at work asked her to go home and change her outfit when she one day came to work wearing a sari. Bhatia's study reveals many other similar instances where people intentionally or unintentionally assign certain identities to others and place them in certain desired and unwanted categories. The above-mentioned question acquires this meaning for Rani precisely because it is connected to similar kinds of episodes that do not allow her to simply be a "pioneering woman", but force her to be a "pioneering *Indian* woman". The time and space context where Rani is located makes certain words or acts meaningful, while deemphasising others. We can assume that due to those little everyday incidents the meaning of "Indian" has changed in Rani's mind since her arrival to America. We can also imagine that while her personal preference and emphasis in her self-understanding "pioneering Indian woman", was initially on the aspect of "pioneering", her experiences in America have brought the aspect of "Indian" into the centre of her way of being, whether she wants it or not. In fact, Bhatia's work shows how many Indian immigrants try to neutralize the label "Indian" as a signifier of their way of being, by referring to more universal labels, such as "human being".

It is proposed here that Rani's case illustrates the kinds of identity struggles that the current model enables to analyse and investigate. These are the moments when personal and collective clash in important ways and new subjective signs that have the power to guide one's entire way of being become constructed. While Bhatia's own theorizing allows understanding the role of others' voices in the identity construction and the ways in which people are constantly negotiating these voices in order to define themselves, the proposed model adds a more person-specific dimension to this analysis. Put differently, while Bhatia's analysis concentrates on Rani's supervisor's demand to go home and change her outfit, the current model suggests to analyze the life-trajectories of individuals in order to understand also the reasons why Rani in fact went home

and changed her sari, when French schoolgirls refused to take off their headscarves.

CHAPTER 10

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 focused on the empirical study that was carried out as part of this research effort. In the final three chapters of the thesis, it is again time to return to the theoretical issues and see how this theoretically oriented study has improved our understanding about identity and identity construction. In this chapter the underlying assumptions and general research questions of the study will be re-visited. In the next chapter the proposed conceptual model will be once again taken up and the aspects of it that need to be refined and further elaborated based on the empirical data will be discussed. The dissertation concludes with a short overview of the contributions this study has made to the general field of identity research and socio-cultural theoretical tradition, as well as considering the possible future directions of the project.

The research effort reported in the current dissertation set out to offer a comprehensive and universal conceptualization of identity. That is, it aimed at bringing together different strands of theorizing in order to offer a conceptual model that explains both the process of identity construction and identity as a result of this construction process in different time and space contexts, as well as in relation to different content areas. In the current chapter it will be explored to

what extent was this goal achieved. In other words, current chapter seeks to answer the question, what have we learned about identity and identity construction based on this research. In accordance with the general aim of the research project this question requires a theoretically oriented answer. What new has this research project offered to the conceptualization of identity and identity construction? Has the research been successful in offering a model of identity construction that is holistic (i.e. takes into account both the entity-like and process-like nature of identity)? Has it been successful in offering a universalistic model of identity (i.e. a model that is applicable to different time and space contexts and different thematic content areas)? Has the proposed model been useful for interpreting the sense-making efforts of young people who participated in the study? Therefore, the general research questions that guided the current investigation will be re-visited here. The specific research questions that are related to the specific aspects of the conceptual model will be discussed in the next chapter.

Nevertheless, the lessons learned from this research are not only related to the theory. The empirical study offers insights into the methodological aspects of the investigation, too. The current study adopted a longitudinal multiple-case study approach and used multiple methods of data collection in order to investigate the personal life-trajectories of young people and to reveal the life-experiences that triggered the identity construction episodes. Has the chosen methodological approach been successful for investigating the personal sense-making process? What were the strengths and weaknesses of the chosen methodology? Let us try to answer each of these questions in turn.

10.1 Suitability of the conceptual model

The main aim of this research project was to offer a conceptual model of identity construction and test the appropriateness of that model based on an empirical investigation. In this part of the chapter the suitability of the model will be discussed from two perspectives. First, it will be considered to what extent is the proposed model theoretically fitting for explaining identity and identity

construction. That is, it will be considered, to what extent can the proposed model avoid the limitations of other identity theories that were referred to and criticized in the beginning of this thesis. Second, the suitability of the model for interpreting personal sense-making process, including identity construction will be discussed.

10.1.1 Theoretical acceptability of the proposed conceptual model

In accordance with the process ontological assumptions of the socio-cultural tradition, that formed the theoretical basis of the current research project, the proposed model focused mainly on explaining the identity construction process. It was proposed that identity construction is not a special kind of psychological function, but can be seen as part of person's ongoing sense-making process. However, while process ontology gives the primacy to the processes, it does not deny the emergence and existence of the results of the process. Hence, it was realized that it is one-sided to talk about the process, without giving any explanation about the outcomes of that process. Therefore, it was proposed that if identity construction is a process of creating personal sense, then identities can be understood as a special kind of subjective signs, more specifically as personally significant and highly generalized metasigns. This kind of conceptual model that explains both the process and the outcome is here believed to be more complete and holistic than these theoretical perspectives that focus on explaining either one or the other. However, it is worth considering whether talking about identities as subjective signs, as semiotic constructions, does not entify these and therefore lead again to the essentialist view of identity. In other words, does this view take us again back to the idea that identities should be seen as 'things' in people's heads?

10.1.1.1 Identities as constantly re-constructed personal meanings

According to the proposed conceptual model people do not function in the world having ready-made and stable ideas about themselves and others in their heads. Identities are not fixed and relatively stable signs that people have constructed and thereafter repeatedly use. Furthermore, the existence of an identity should not be taken as a pre-given, as a matter of fact which needs no further explanation.

Instead, the conceptual model advocated here proposes that identities become constructed when the situation requires. This is an important difference between the proposed conceptual model and the view put forward by essentialist theories of identity. To re-iterate, identity, for example ethnic identity, is not something that everybody has, but rather a personal meaning that becomes constructed in order to deal with certain life-situations. The fact that most people have encountered these situations and therefore have constructed this meaning does not turn it into a pre-given and universal phenomenon. From this perspective, it is uncertain what exactly is under investigation in studies that aim at examining trans-national identities, such as European, or ethno-cultural identities, such as Estonian, on the inter-individual level. Is it a subjective sign which is used to define oneself? Or is it a collective representation of being Estonian or European which may not be personally relevant and self-defining?

It is argued here that the proposed conceptual model offers an explanation how and why identities emerge. When trying to illustrate this process of identity construction a metaphor of carpet weaving may be useful (Valsiner, personal communication). A carpet becomes woven by using parallel and multiple threads of yarn, which become tied together in knots. Personal sense-making can also be seen as a process of carpet weaving. The threads or strands of personal sense-making that differ according to their content are available for people to use for weaving their life-carpet. The personal experience of reacting to different life-events is accumulated in those threads. But these are loose threads, which can be taken up and tied together at any given moment of time in any given way. Joining a knot may become necessary when a rupture occurs and a person needs to temporarily find a balance in the flow of thoughts and ideas. The subjective signs, including identities become created in those moments. In the next moment of time the attention wanders elsewhere and the previously tied knot becomes irrelevant. However, the threads that were used to tie this knot can be used again to tie another knot somewhere else. What threads exactly are used to tie a specific knot is not known before, nor is it clear how exactly the new knot will look like. The life-situations the person encounters decide what kinds of knots become created. In this process of weaving, new threads become created in time and added to the

carpet to be used again in later stages, while some of the previously knitted threads are left aside and not used anymore.

To put this into the context of the current empirical investigation, all the students in the reported study had an experience of growing-up in Estonia and being a person from Estonia. However, the exact meaning of being Estonian was different for each of them. Furthermore, some of them did not encounter life-situations where defining oneself as Estonian was necessary. For these individuals this identity knot did not become created, while for others it needed to be tied repeatedly to enable untying other undesirable but imposed identity knots.

The carpet metaphor also enables to deal with another question that informed the study. If the subjective signs are always in the process of construction and re-construction, how can they provide the person with the sense of sameness and continuity? In the discussion of the subjective sign construction Valsiner's (2001) idea about the maintenance of the upright body posture through continuous correction of episodic imbalanced states was used (see Chapter 4). This parallel is worth keeping in mind when thinking about the subjective sign construction that provides us with the necessary flexibility to react to ever-new life-experiences, but at the same time offers a sense of sameness and continuity. Returning to the carpet metaphor, the threads that become created in the flow of irreversible time as a result of our reactions to the emergent life-experiences are available for us to use whenever a new knot needs to be tied. The new knot becomes joined using those already existing threads and this provides the person with the sense of sameness. The two knots in the carpet are never equal, but the fact that some threads in the knot are used again offers the sense of continuity to the person.

As any metaphor, the carpet metaphor is only an illustration and simplification of the real-life phenomenon. In reality, the subjective sign construction process is obviously more complex. The idea that identities as knots are always tied anew, applies also to all other meanings, hence also to the threads. These are not once created and thereafter used in a stable manner, but also continuously knitted and re-knitted in the flow of irreversible time. In this sense,

each thread can be seen as sequence of little knots. However, the idea of already existing meanings as threads that are relatively stable and identities as knots that are created by tying together those threads seems to be a useful way of illustrating the process and outcome of identity construction.

10.1.1.2 Identity construction as a boundary-process

The previous discussion demonstrates how the proposed conceptual model avoids some of the limitations of other theoretical perspectives dealing with identity. First, the question about identities as entities was considered, and then the possibility of combining the ongoing sign construction and sense of sameness provided by identity, was explained. One further question needs to be addressed when discussing the theoretical suitability of the proposed model of identity construction. Namely, how is the process of identity construction, seen as part of the ongoing sense-making process, different from the criticized individualistic processes of identity construction? In other words, how does the proposed model explain a person's functioning in relation to the context not in separation from it?

According to the inseparability claim (Sawyer, 2002) that has informed the current research project, person and context should be seen as two parts of a bigger whole. While these parts can be analytically separated, their dynamic intertwinement has to be always kept in mind. That is, person and context are mutually enabling and constraining, each becomes constructed and functions through the ongoing interaction with the other. Personal meaning-making is understood as a process at the boundary between person and environment. It is a process that links the two parts of the whole together. The other flows into the self through the process of sense-making. The other is there when the meaning is created, by offering an other perspective that the self can turn towards oneself. It is also there when the personal sense is externalized and turned into collective meaning by offering a way of validating and verifying the personal sense. The self and the context with its multiplicity of voices do not stand in separation from one another, but flow into each other. The self feeds into collective and constrains the collective through this process, and the collective creates certain boundaries for the functioning of the self.

Defining the relationship between the person and context as mutually transformative avoids the danger of overemphasising the power of collective discourses. The person can execute its agency and carve out for oneself niches within the socio-cultural context that enable one to be who one wants to be. However, this personal agency can be executed within certain boundaries. It is not only about sense-making minds that can construct whatever they want to construct. The constructed personal sense becomes verified by its consequences and therefore constrained by the collective. Hence, the person and context are intertwined. They come to inhabit each other through the process of sense-making.

By taking this stance towards the description of person and context relationship, identity as a personal sense, becomes a temporary stabilization of this mutually transformative flow between the person and environment. It does not describe solely the individual. It does not belong solely to the individual. It is a construction at the boundary between the person and the context, which temporarily defines the person's position within and in relation to the context. It says something about the person, but it says just as much about the context. In other words, the sense is made by the individual, but it is always made of something and in relation to something. It is assumed here that this constant focus on the other, in relation to which the sense is made, keeps the person and context inseparable.

Hence, it is argued here that seeing identity construction as part of the personal sense-making process, that emphasises the intertwinement of person and environment differs in important ways from the cognitive processes that are proposed to explain the identity construction in individualistic perspective. The mutually transformative nature of the person/context relationship is in the proposed conceptual model maintained throughout the sense-making process and it goes beyond the simple acknowledgement of the sociogenetic nature of personal sense. It is argued here that differently from individualistic theories, the proposed model does not only allow explaining why identities as personal meanings are constructed, but also offer ways of understanding the process by way of which

these personally significant and highly generalized signs emerge and continue functioning.

10.1.2 Interpretative capacity of the proposed conceptual model

The conceptual model of identity construction that was proposed in the current project emerged through the constant back and forth movement between the theory and data. The general theoretical ideas within the socio-cultural tradition were used to design the empirical study and these guided also the preliminary data analysis. The proposed model of identity construction is based on those general theoretical ideas, but was formulated based on the analysis of the cases from the present empirical study. It enabled interpreting and analysing the data from all the eight individual cases with their different thematic contents. In addition to this, two further cases where secondary analysis was carried out were presented in the thesis to demonstrate the possible extension of the model to other time and space contexts and thematic areas. Based on this research effort it seems justified to claim that the proposed conceptual model is a useful tool for interpreting and making sense of the data about identity that is related to a variety of thematic contents and socio-cultural contexts.

While the proposed model proved to be a useful tool for interpreting these different cases one could ask, whether there, in fact, are any cases or any empirical material which would not fit with the proposed conceptual model. In other words, should the wide applicability of the model be considered as its strength, demonstrating its universalistic and generic nature, or should it be seen as the weakness of the model, which is too generic to be proven wrong.

The current research effort is based on the idea that the value of a theory lies in its usefulness. Theory is seen as a vehicle that enables to ask interesting questions and therefore produces exciting empirical work. It is also seen as a tool for interpreting and making sense of the empirical data. According to this view, theories are not different because one is more accurate than the other. Rather theories differ in their ways of interpreting the world. Different theories highlight different aspects of the phenomena under investigation and offer

different kinds of explanations for the emergence, essence and functioning of the phenomena. There are no right or wrong theories. There are just theories that explain the world in different ways and some of these explanations are more useful than others. In other words, some of them have more interpretative capacity than others.

Several theoretical perspectives of identity were discussed in the current dissertation. Individualistic theories of identity and social constructionist perspective were disregarded as limited in favour of the socio-cultural approach. The fact that they were considered to be limited is important here. The former two perspectives were not abandoned because they were considered inaccurate. They were simply seen to be too narrow for dealing with the complex and multifaceted process of sense-making. As tools for interpreting complex, rich and often messy qualitative data, which was believed to be necessary for understanding personal sense-making, they were considered to be insufficient. While they are useful and valid ways of dealing with other kind of research questions and other kind of data, they seemed to be one-sided for the current research effort.

It is argued here that the proposed conceptual model can be considered as a useful way of looking at identity and identity construction because it highlights the universal aspects of this phenomenon. The essence of the conceptual model is in the following cycle: rupture → semiotic auto-regulation → re-establishment of person/context equilibrium. In the proposed conceptual model this basic cycle has been used in conjunction with some other ideas about personal sense-making that have been elaborated within the socio-cultural tradition over the years. Importantly, the ideas concerning hetero- and auto-dialogues have been essential in expanding this basic cycle and making it suitable for explaining identity construction process. Many of these additional ideas, such as the notion of rupture and the role of the other in identity construction, need further refinement (see next chapter). Nevertheless, the current research project offers support to the high interpretative capacity of the conceptual model, which is built around this basic cycle, across different time and space context, as well as across different thematic content areas.

The current research project has been the first one where the proposed model has been utilized. In this project, it proved to be a useful tool for interpreting the data. The further work with this model, which applies it to other contexts and contents, tries to find cases that fit, as well as the ones that do not fit with the model, is critical for developing the model further. This future work would enable seeing whether the claims about the universalistic nature of the model are in fact justified. However, if the model can be a useful sense-making vehicle also in those other studies, then it adds further support to the present argument that the universalistic nature of the conceptual model should be seen as its strength, rather than its possible weakness.

10.2 Suitability of the methodological approach

The previous part of this chapter focused on the theoretical issues and discussed what was learned from the study in relation to the general research questions and underlying assumptions. In this part of the chapter the methodological approach used in the empirical study will be re-visited with the aim of pointing out what ideas related to study design and data collection methods proved to be successful for examining personal sense-making processes and what aspects need re-consideration. In accordance with the topics to be discussed, the following part of the chapter will be more concrete and practical in its language.

10.2.1 Longitudinal study design

The current study was designed to last for one year. This choice was mostly informed by the impossibility of knowing the exact life-events that would have triggered the young people's identity construction episodes and the specific timeframes related to these events. Therefore it was decided that a one-year period would be long enough to see the impact of the move to England as a rupture in individuals' sense-making, as well as to explore some other possible life-experiences and their influence. This decision seems to be justified in the case of the current study. A shorter timeframe would have probably decreased the possibility of seeing the fluctuations in personal sense-making and made it impossible to explore the disappearance of certain themes. A longer study period

would have placed too great demands on participants' contribution, considering that they were asked to report their experiences once a month. The decline in their motivation was somewhat evident at the end of the one-year period, especially in relation to completing the questionnaires. Also, the changing circumstances of young people's lives made it increasingly difficult to maintain their interest and engagement beyond that time scale.

Nevertheless, while the one-year study period seemed to be justified in the present case, it is argued here that in general the time-frame of the specific events that are under investigation should be used as the basis for determining the length of the exploration.

The study seems to indicate that the initially chosen design and sequence of the study needs to be approached with significant flexibility in the case of longitudinal investigation. In the current study the plan to gather some collectively constructed data through focus groups was abandoned during the course of the project. Also, the initial plan of having before-and-after interviews was modified to include an additional interview in the middle of the study period. However, the flexibility in the case of longitudinal design cannot be confused with randomness in choosing the data collection methods. The current investigation shows that the careful planning of the entire research period is necessary for meeting the aims of the study, as well as for maintaining the motivation of the study participants.

10.2.2 Data collection methods

Several comments should be made about the specific data collection methods used in the current study. The semi-structured non-directive interviews were very suitable for revealing the details of participants' life-experiences and related thoughts and feelings. They enabled to probe certain themes and gather necessary detailed information about life-events that were only briefly mentioned in the questionnaires. Similarly, the specific exercises that were used during the interviews met their purpose of facilitating the discussion. However, the in-depth interviews were retrospective in their nature and therefore did not reveal

immediate reactions to specific life-events and related sense-making efforts. While the study did not seek to investigate the micro-genetic process of sense-making in its occurrence, it still needs to be kept in mind that time is an important factor in sense-making as the relevance and importance of certain events change as a function of time.

The use of monthly open-ended questionnaires seemed to a certain extent to deal with this possible limitation of the retrospective nature of interviews. The reactions to certain life-events that were collected with the questionnaires were more immediate. The combination of these two data collection methods seems therefore justified. However, the usage of questionnaires to gather information about life-experiences seemed to be suitable in some cases, while it did not reveal much in others. Some study participants seemed to enjoy writing about their experiences, while others gave very short and superficial accounts. This reveals the need to be flexible in the usage of data collection methods. It also points to the need to offer different ways of recording personal experiences to different participants based on their preferences. For example, audio-recordings might be useful for collecting personal reflections in some cases. While the advantage of this data collection method is the relative ease of usage for participants and possible immediacy in relation to life-events, the difficulties of data analysis that stem from the quantity of the data need to be considered when choosing this method. The usage of information technology, for example online chat-rooms or personal or collective online blogs, is another way of approaching this limitation of written questionnaires.

While the quality of the data collected with the open-ended questions in the questionnaires differed across cases, the sentence completion exercise that was repeatedly added to the questionnaires proved to be highly useful and suitable for exploring the fluctuations in personal feelings and sense-making. This type of questioning might therefore be an interesting and useful alternative to the open-ended questions when collecting data about significant life-experiences and related feelings and thoughts.

The methodological approach used in the current research project with

its strengths and weaknesses was discussed in the previous sections in general terms. In reality, the design of the study and the choice of the methodological approach go hand in hand with the theoretical considerations. The methodological approach used here seemed to be fitting with the theoretical assumptions of the current study, but this may not be appropriate for a study that utilizes a different theoretical frame. Therefore, the lessons learned from the current study in relation to the study design and data collection methods, should be re-assessed through a specific theoretical lense in future similar kind of studies.

CHAPTER 11

MODEL REFINEMENT

The current research project aimed to propose a model of identity construction that would bring together different strands of theorizing within the socio-cultural tradition, and offering a comprehensive account of identity construction as a personal sense-making process. In this chapter another look at the proposed model will be taken and these aspects of the model that should be developed further in the light of the empirical material from the current study will be discussed. In particular, the discussion will centre around two main topics: the role of the other in personal sense-making, and the refinement of the concept of rupture. The chapter will conclude with introducing a general idea of conceptualizing identity construction as a weaving together of multiple, parallel and interwoven threads of personal sense-making. Through the discussion of these issues the chapter aims at examining the findings of the study in relation to the more specific research questions, which were formulated using the proposed conceptual model (see Chapter 1).

11.1 The role of the other in personal sense-making

Voice of the other is an essential component of the current model of identity

construction. According to the model a rupture makes the perspective of the other “visible” in the self-system. The empirical data from the current research project enables one to look more closely at the ways in which the perspective of the other can be present in the self-system, as well as allowing one to see different functions the voice of the other can have in semiotic auto-regulation.

11.1.1 Forms of otherness within the self-system

Individual’s reaction to specific life-events sends a message to the surrounding environment about that person. This message creates a sign about that person in the minds of the others that by externalizing that sign offer feedback in form of social suggestions to the individual. This way the external other can enter into dialogue with the acting self. In addition to that, individual’s reaction sends a message also to the person him/herself. Through this feed-forward loop or reverse action in Vygotskian terms, the self will take the position of the other within the self-system, looking back at the self from the perspective of the observer (see also section 4.6.1). In looking back at the acting self from the perspective of the observer, the self can use different positions within the self-system from different time-frames, but also from different levels of generalization. Based on this distinction between the external other and the self as the other within the self-system and using the empirical data from the current research project, a typology of forms of otherness within the self-system can be proposed:

1. The external other can be present within the self-system as:

- Personalized other – incoming social suggestion is connected to a specific individual (e.g. “My father said, that if I don’t find work, I have to come back”)
- Universalized other – incoming social suggestion is attributed to a generalized group of people, not to the specific person (e.g. “Other Estonians think that I am prolonging my childhood”)
- Institutionalized other – incoming social suggestion is attributed to an institution (e.g. “University here considers me as a Home Student”).

2. Self as the other can be present within the self-system as:

- Observer of the acting self in the present – the reaction of the self is looked back at by the observing self immediately after the act (e.g. “Did I just answer this way to him?”)
- Past self as the observer of the acting self in the present – the reaction of the self is looked back at from the past position (e.g. “I used to have the highest grades in my university at home, but now it is all gone”)
- Anticipated future self as the observer of the acting self in the present – the reaction of the self is looked back at from the anticipated future situation. Life-goal orientations as applied to the person can be understood as idealized and anticipated future selves that can be used to observe the acting self in the present (e.g. “If I want to be a successful lawyer one day I need to become more focused now”).

The perspective of the other perceived as a dialogue partner within the self-system is always first imagined, even if it refers to a real other. That is, the self is able to take the perspective of the other only if the other is imagined within the self-system. However, the differentiation between the other that is real (i.e. a real other imagined by the self) and the other who is imagined (i.e. an other who is completely imagined by the self) can be useful when analysing the inner dialogues. The anticipated future self as an observer of the present self falls into that category of imagined dialogue partner. All the different external others can also be imagined rather than real (e.g. “My mother would be worried, if she knew”).

The typology proposed here is derived from the empirical data available in the current research project. Therefore it should be considered as a preliminary classification open to further refinements.

11.1.2 Voice of the other as catalyst of identity construction

The appearance of the perspective of the other in its different forms within the intra-psychological meaning space does not always create negative tension that

raises questions of identity. In the normal flow of everyday events the voices of the others co-exist smoothly within the self-system offering the self the needed flexibility to deal effectively with differing life-experiences. The dynamic stability of multi-voicedness is the normal way of functioning for the self-system (Valsiner, 2002). However, under certain circumstances the perspective of the other creates tension within the intra-psychological meaning field. Gillespie's (2006) concept of renegade voice, also refers to these tension-creating and destabilizing voices. Importantly, the perspective of the other does not have to be entered into the self-system from the outside, but as the previously described typology proposes, it can also appear within the self-system as an observing self looking back at the acting self. As a result of the rupture the existing semiotic regulators lose their functionality and semiotic auto-regulation needs to deal with the emerging inner tension.

The perspective of the other creates tension by launching the difference between the position of the acting self and some more desirable perspective into the self-system. This can be done by introducing into the intra-psychological field a perspective that is equally or more desirable than the position of the acting self. For example, in the statement "I am not able to perform well now, but I used to be very smart and intelligent", the past self functions as a more desirable comparison. The tension can also be created by introducing into the self-system a perspective that itself is not desirable, but makes the position of the acting self seem undesirable. For example, in the statement "English people don't like Eastern-Europeans", the perceived voice of the other makes the sign "I am Eastern-European" seem undesirable.

The current study reveals an interesting aspect in the perspective of the other as catalyst of the identity construction that needs to be further conceptualized. Through the perspective of the other, a new sign can be introduced into the self-system that was not present there before, but which escalates into a newly constructed identity due to others' constant and repeated impositions. The case of A. from the current study, as well as the case of E., demonstrates this mechanism in relation to Eastern-European identity (see

sections 8.1.3.4 and 8.2.3.4). In both of these cases the imposed identity is resisted by the active sense-making person. Also R.'s case reveals how the person can actively externalize her different way of being and through that not only resist the imposed identity, but also seek to change the respective collective representation (see section 8.7.3.4). However, also the opposite result of the outside pressure to person's identity construction can be conceptualized. The attention and repeated imposition from the others can trigger the cascade of recursive semiosis and escalate into the creation of new identity that as a highly generalized metasign starts to guide person's way of relating to the world. The French school-girls' headscarf affair that was discussed in Chapter 9 exemplifies this process very clearly.

11.1.3 Voice of the other as a tension reduction mechanism

The empirical material from the current study shows that the perspective of the other does not function within the self-system only as a catalyst of the tension. In addition to creating imbalance, the voice of the other can also be used in semiotic auto-regulation as a mechanism of reducing tension.

According to the proposed model the tension between the contrasting voices within the self-system can be reduced through dialogical engagement of these voices. Semiotic auto-regulation that uses auto- or hetero-dialogues can result in some form of assimilation (i.e. the voices become combined in some way), in domination (i.e. one voice suppresses or blocks the other) or in functional separation (i.e. different voices continue to co-exist in a way that is functional) (see Valsiner, 2002 for typology of dialogical relations between voices). However, this direct dialogical engagement between different perspectives may not always lead to the re-establishment of functional equilibrium. The data from the current study demonstrate that in order to reduce tension between different perspectives the self can introduce a third voice into the dialogue. This third voice then functions as a vehicle that enables the semiotic auto-regulation to move on. The resolution of the tension can be achieved by constructing a new higher level sign that combines the initially contradictory perspectives, by giving dominance to one of the perspectives over another, or by dominating over both contradictory

perspectives and separating them in a manner that avoids further tension. After the tension within the self-system becomes controlled the third voice that is introduced into the sign construction process may continue to linger in the intrapsychological meaning space, but it can also disappear altogether after completing its function as a catalyst (see also Valsiner, 2002).

The data from the current study show that the life-goal orientations as highly generalized metasigns about one's idealized and anticipated future ways of being can often be used as catalysts that enable to control the tension between different voices. For example, R.'s case reveals how the tension between two positions "me as being lonely when being away from my sister" and "me as wanting to live abroad" is controlled by a life-goal orientation "I want to grow personally" which is applied to this particular tension-filled situation as a sign "our new experiences abroad enrich our relationship" (see section 8.7.3.3). Hence, the data offer support of conceptualizing the self-system as a hierarchically organized system of subjective signs where different voices from different levels of generalization within the system or from outside the system can be used as catalysts of subjective sign construction.

The focus of the current study has been to understand how identity, i.e. the sense of sameness and continuity, is constructed and maintained beyond a rupture. The semiotic auto-regulation that uses different metasigns to block or reconsider others' perspectives within the self-system has therefore been seen as a process that by enabling stability and continuity has a positive outcome. However, the process of identity construction that leads to the re-establishment of *status quo* at the expense of blocking another perspective to one's being can also be seen as something that hinders personal development. This possible negative outcome of semiotic auto-regulation is not investigated in the current study, but can be seen as one of the directions worth considering for further model development and application (see also Gillespie, 2008 in press).

11.2 Rupture as a trigger of identity construction

The data from the current study indicate that the same life-events can have very different consequences on personal sense-making across individuals. The same experience can lead to a serious re-configuration of the self-system in case of some individuals, while it does not have such profound effects on others. This highlights the need to further develop the idea of rupture as a trigger of identity construction. It is proposed here that one way of doing this is looking at different types of ruptures as these are linked to different kinds of subjective signs within the intra-psychological field.

11.2.1 Dimensions of subjective signs

The existing literature that deals with subjective sign construction focuses mostly on the dimension of generalization. According to Valsiner (2007b) subjective signs become constructed within the intra-psychological field in dialogue between voices as situation-specific constructions. In time, however, they take a more generalized form, being separated from specific context and becoming trans-situational. While the situation-specific signs regulate individual's functioning in specific contexts (e.g. "I am a high-school student"), the generalized signs have a more overwhelming character and regulate person's life and functioning in general. Person's life-goals function such as highly generalized metasigns that influence person's entire way of being (e.g. "I want to be successful").

This dimension of subjective signs seems to deal mostly with the extent of influence the signs can have on a person's functioning. In addition to this, however, subjective signs seem to differ also in their relative importance for the individual. This dimension can therefore be related to the depth of influence, ranging from very significant self-defining subjective signs (i.e. "I am a smart young woman") to less relevant, peripheral signs (e.g. "I am a straightforward person"). While Valsiner's theorizing seems to consider these two dimensions together (i.e. self-defining signs are also generalized signs, while peripheral signs are situation-specific), it is proposed here that these two dimensions could also be considered separately. The differentiation of those two dimensions creates four

types of subjective signs as presented in Figure 11.2.1.

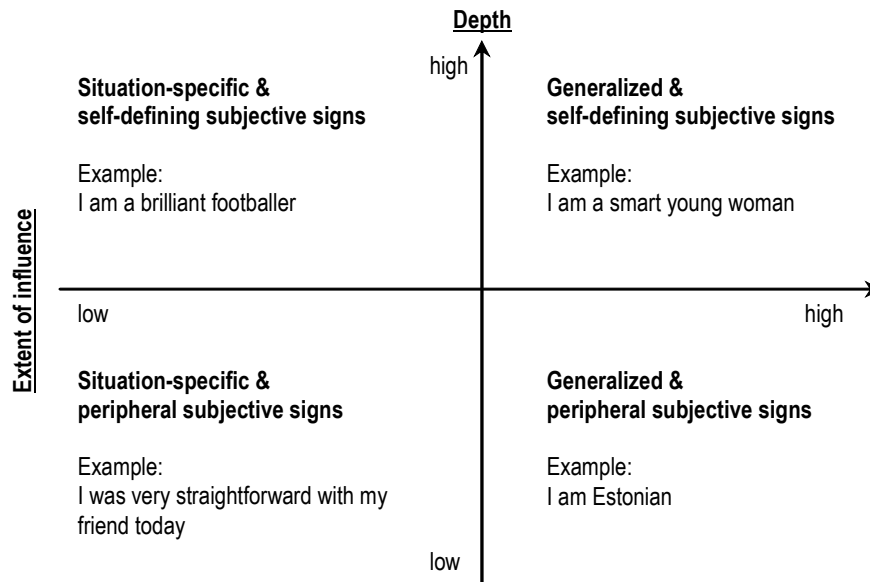


Figure 11.2.1 Dimensions of subjective signs

For the reasons of clarity the dimensions are presented here in a dichotomized manner. However, it needs to be kept in mind that subjective signs are not fixed to specific points on those dimensions, but can move along them in relation to personal experiences. For example, a generalized and peripheral future-related life-goal of becoming a mother can start to function as a self-defining and generalized metasign, when one actually becomes a mother. The same sign can transform into being a peripheral and situation-specific in later stages in one's life when one's children have grown up and one starts to prepare for the life as a career-focused professional or grandparent instead.

The differentiation of these two dimensions offers some clarity in understanding the variety of subjective signs within the intra-psychological system, which individuals use in semiotic auto-regulation. Nevertheless, the main aim of proposing this four-fold typology of subjective signs is to understand and further develop the concept of rupture by relating it to the concept of subjective sign.

11.2.2 A typology of ruptures

The above-described dimensions of subjective signs and the respective four-fold typology enable to re-conceptualize also the notion of rupture as it is used in the current model of identity construction. The data from the current research project show that there are different kinds of ruptures that individuals experience during the course of their life. Some of the ruptures are perceived as very strong, sudden and highly disturbing, while others cause some lingering tension that is not immediately dysfunctional. Furthermore, the same life-event, for example moving to a foreign country, can be perceived as a serious rupture by one individual, while being experienced as a creator of mild tension in the case of another.

It is argued here that the above-proposed typology of subjective signs and understanding which type of signs is affected by a rupture enables one to comprehend the intensity and personal reaction to it. Following the above-mentioned typology, a four-fold typology of ruptures could be proposed as shown in Figure 11.2.2¹².

Sudden, strong and overwhelming rupture. This type of rupture is created by a life-event that affects the self-defining and generalized subjective signs. These are personally the most significant signs that define the person's being in general terms. Therefore the rupture that touches those signs leads to the need of restructuring of the self-system in light of new incoming social suggestions. The tension is intense, but not easily resolved and therefore the rupture creates long-term effects on a person's sense-making efforts. In the current study, this type of rupture is most clearly presented in the case of H., who perceives the return to Estonia as a strong and negative break in her preferred way of being. Similarly, the break-up from her boyfriend is perceived as a powerful and unwanted life-event by her. This type of rupture is evident also in the case of P., especially in relation to her sister's name change, but also the negative feedback that she

¹² Examples given in the table are illustrative. The subjective signs given here as examples can also be interpreted differently (i.e. belong to a different type) and therefore cause different kinds of ruptures.

receives to her assignments can be seen as an undesirable incident in her life that makes her question the deeply rooted ideas about herself. While this type of rupture is easily recognizable when it creates negative tension within the self-system, also the events that are perceived positively by individuals, but still lead to a substantive re-configuration of the self-system should be categorized under this type. Thus, A.'s and P.'s new relationships and E.'s, H.'s and T.'s perceived move to England should be seen as strong, sudden and overwhelming ruptures.

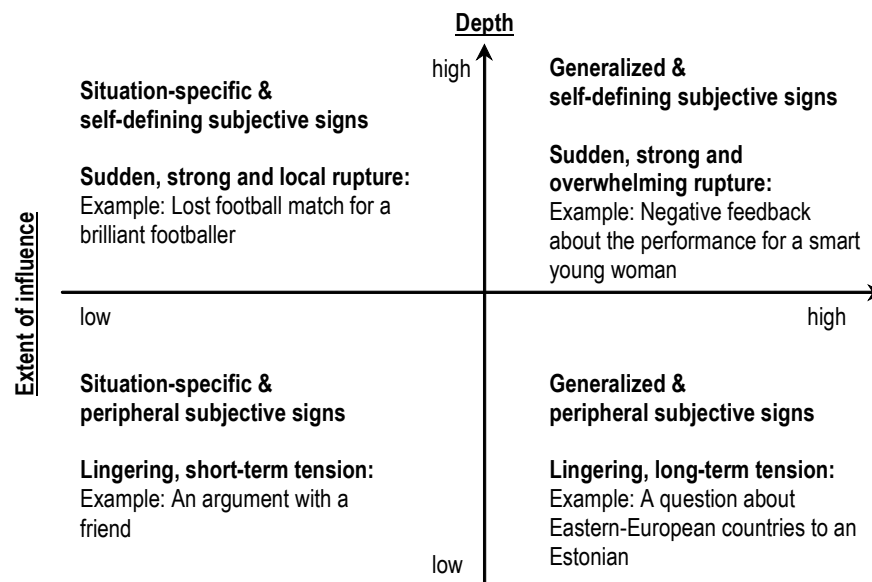


Figure 11.2.2 Typology of ruptures

Sudden, strong and local rupture. This type of rupture is created by a life-event that touches personally significant, but situation-specific subjective signs. The life-event does create emotional turmoil and questions about one's way of being, but only in relation to a specific context. The tension does not have an overwhelming affect and does not lead to the re-structuring of the self-system in general, but only in relation to a specific, local sphere of one's being. Therefore it is easier to deal with and has less long-term effects on person's sense-making. An illustration of this kind of rupture would be a lost football match for a person who considers him to be a brilliant football player. The examples of this kind of rupture from the current study include R.'s reactions to the relatively negative

feedback to her last assignments, but also E.'s reactions to changing jobs and accommodation.

Lingering long-term tension. This type of rupture is created by life-experiences that touch generalized, but peripheral subjective metasigns. General life-goal orientations as they were conceptualized in the current work fall under this category. While having an overwhelming impact on person's way of being life-goal orientations are usually future-oriented and relatively abstract ways of defining oneself. While they function as general guiding principles in one's life, their abstractness makes them somewhat distant from the core aspects of the self. As future-related subjective signs they are relatively flexible and open to alterations. Therefore, the life-events that touch one's life-goal orientations usually do not create intense tension within the self-system that has to be resolved through the re-structuring of personal meaning field. Rather, the tension that becomes created by a life-event is lingering within the self-system. It is somewhat uncomfortable and needs to be dealt with, but not in an immediate and self-changing manner. This kind of lingering tension that is related to one's life-goals is evident for example in the case of A. and N. in relation to their future plans. This kind of lingering tension that is created by the impact on generalized, but peripheral signs other than life-goals can be found for example in the case of A., R., L. and E. in relation to the Eastern-European identity that is imposed on them.

Lingering short-term tension. This kind of tension is created by life-events that touch the situation-specific and peripheral subjective signs. These are probably the most often experienced disturbances in person-environment equilibrium. However, because this kind of break in one's normal flow of being has minimal and short-term impact on one's sense-making they often go unnoticed. The tension they create is local and short-term. Example of this kind of tension is a fight with a friend that makes us think about our way of being in that specific situation in relation to that specific person. We may feel disturbed by that experience for couple of hours, but the equilibrium between self-system and environment can easily become re-established by a simple apology or another positive experience that directs our attention to something else. Because of the

short-term and lingering nature of these kinds of tensions, they were not investigated in the current empirical study.

Several further comments are in order in relation to the above-developed typology of ruptures. First, it has to be kept in mind that all the described breaks in person's normal flow of being can be either positive or negative. The current typology enables one to understand the impact a rupture has on personal sense-making. It needs to be kept in mind that both positive and negative ruptures can have a similar impact. Second, the life-events that create certain kind of ruptures need not necessarily be real, but can also be imagined and anticipated. The lingering long-term tension which is related to the life-goal orientations is often linked with an anticipated future situation, such as graduation from the university or returning to one's homeland. The idea that ruptures can be created by imagined and anticipated future events has to be considered also in relation to other types of ruptures. Third, as mentioned before, subjective signs are not fixed entities, but can be re-interpreted and re-evaluated. A peripheral and situation-specific sign can become generalized and self-defining under social pressure or generalized sign can be re-interpreted as a situation-specific semiotic regulator. Depending on this re-interpretation, tension can escalate into a stronger rupture or be re-perceived as less serious. An example of the latter, downplaying of the rupture is evident in the case of R. in relation to her interpretation of the negative feedback to her assignments (see P.'s case for comparison). While the current study does not offer a clear example of the escalation of the rupture, the cases of A. and E. in relation to imposed Eastern-European identity seem to highlight this potential.

The above-described typology of subjective signs and related typology of ruptures are not fully evidenced with empirical material from the current research, but rather theoretically constructed. Therefore they should be considered as possible future alleys for investigation and development.

11.3 Intra-psychological field as a complex system of multiple, parallel and interwoven strands of personal sense-making

The empirical data from the current research project shows that the above-described ruptures and tensions are not exclusive, but can be experienced by the person in the same period of life. For example, while P. is constantly searching for a way of living that would be in accordance with her life-goal orientations (e.g. Where should I live? What kind of job should I do? Should I make my decision in function of career or close relations? etc.), she experiences also sudden breaks in that normal flow of life, when the negative feedback to her performance makes her doubt her intelligence or the sister's name change makes her insecure about her deepest values and principles. Hence, the ruptures and tensions are a normal part of a person's functioning within a socio-cultural context. Some of these tensions are mild, others intense. Some take minutes to recover from; others may cause wounds that never completely heal. All these tensions and ruptures feed into the personal sense-making process that is therefore multi-stranded and multi-layered.

Based on the theoretical model and empirical data from the current study, the intra-psychological field could be conceptualized as a complex system of multiple, parallel, co-emerging and interwoven sense-making strands. This means that the different themes within the individual cases in relation to which personal sense-making efforts were discussed in the current dissertation should not be considered in isolation from each other. Rather these should be seen as different sense-making strands that are intertwined and co-emerge in time. The metaphor of carpet weaving that was already used in the previous chapter is useful for illustrating this process. Different sense-making strands can be seen as different threads that are used to weave the carpet and the construction of identities can be seen as knot-tying which uses those available and newly created threads.

Identity construction is not a linear movement from one state within self-system to another, but a multi-stranded dynamic process, where different threads are intertwined and results from one sense-making strand feed into the

process of semiotic auto-regulation on other strands, leading to a constant making and remaking of personal meanings in relation to the surrounding socio-cultural environment. The subjective signs that become constructed and re-constructed in the process differ in their relative significance to the person (depth dimension of subjective signs) and in their level of generalization (extent of impact dimension of subjective signs). In the process of identity construction that takes place in irreversible time, these multiple, parallel, co-emerging and intertwined threads of sense-making are temporarily tied together to form a knot and this creates an episodic sense of sameness and continuity. As another rupture or tension shakes the equilibrium between person and environment new recursive semiosis is set in motion and the previously tied knot of different sense-making strands is again untied. All this weaving together and tying the knots takes place in irreversible time, where a person's life-goals provide a sense of direction in the face of unpredictable future.

Therefore, the intra-psychological system should be seen as a four-dimensional phenomenon: it consists of parallel strands of sense-making; it functions on the basis of subjective signs that differ in their depth and extent; and it is functioning in the irreversible time. While this conceptualization needs to be further explored, it seems to be a fruitful starting-point for further enquiries.

CHAPTER 12

SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This final chapter of the dissertation aims to summarize the reported research project. This summary will be provided by considering the contribution of the study to the general field of identity research, as well as to the wider socio-cultural tradition. The chapter also includes a short discussion of the possible spin-off projects that take into account the ideas developed in this study and seek to overcome some of the limitations of the reported project.

12.1 Contribution of the research project

12.1.1 Theoretically grounded way of understanding identity and identity construction

The present research project makes a contribution to the general field of identity research by offering a comprehensive way of conceptualizing identity and identity construction. The proposed theoretical perspective sees identity construction as part of person's ongoing sense-making process and understands identity as personally significant and highly generalized metasigns that become created in this process.

The proposed conceptual model brings together many different strands of theorizing within the socio-cultural tradition. Therefore, the model is theoretically grounded and the identity construction process, as well as the emergence of identity as a result of this process is clearly and explicitly explained.

The proposed conceptual model is believed to be universalistic in nature. That is, it is claimed to be suitable for interpreting identity construction episodes in a variety of socio-cultural contexts and in relation to different thematic content areas. As such, the proposed model is seen as a useful tool to be utilized and further tested in future empirical work.

12.1.2 Further elaboration of the role of the other in personal sense-making

The current study makes several theoretical contributions to the conceptualization of a person's functioning in and in relation to the socio-cultural context. First, it elaborates further the ideas about the role of the other in personal sense-making.

The current research project sees the voice of the other as a trigger of identity construction process, as it launches a difference between the acting and desired self into the self-system. This idea of the destabilization of the self-system through the introduction of a different voice has been iterated before in the socio-cultural literature. The current study offers a further specification of this idea in relation to identity construction. It provides examples that show how the constant and ongoing attention and meaning-imposition from the other can escalate into identity construction episodes that may have overwhelming consequences to one's being and self-definition.

12.1.3 Further specification of the notion of rupture

The second important contribution this study makes to the general socio-cultural tradition is related to the notion of rupture.

The concept of rupture has often been utilized in the contemporary socio-cultural research. Most of the time the notion is used in general terms with reference to the function of the rupture: an event that creates a break in the normal

flow of one's life. The current study acknowledges and uses the idea that rupture functions as a trigger of identity construction, but it also develops further the idea that the same event can have very different consequences to the lives of different individuals. The study suggests that these differing effects can be explained by understanding which kind of subjective signs become influenced by the rupture. Based on this reasoning the study proposes a typology of subjective signs and a related typology of ruptures. These typologies should be seen as important theoretical contributions of this research project, which should be utilized, tested and developed further in future investigations.

12.1.4 New way of illustrating the functioning of the intra-psychological field

The current research project suggests to conceptualize the intra-psychological field as a complex system of multiple, parallel, co-emerging and interwoven sense-making strands. According to this conceptualization, the intra-psychological field can be seen as a four-dimensional system: it consists of parallel strands of sense-making; it functions on the basis of subjective signs that differ in their depth and extent; and it is functioning in the flow of irreversible time. The metaphor of carpet weaving, which illustrates how identities as subjective signs are joined together in certain moments in time, using the available meaning-making threads, is proposed in the investigation.

The proposed conceptualization was outlined in the current project in general manner and therefore needs further exploration and elaboration. Nevertheless, this view together with the related carpet weaving metaphor is an important contribution of the reported investigation that seems to be a fruitful starting-point for further enquiries.

12.2 Possible future directions of the research project

12.2.1 Micro-genesis and personal sense-making

The first of the possible future directions of the research project deals with the methodological issues. The current research project used a longitudinal multiple-case study approach, and focused on collecting detailed, qualitative and person-

specific data through questionnaires and interviews. Thus, the study was relatively traditional in its usage of different data collection methods.

The study can be considered to have been successful in revealing and analysing the personal sense-making episodes over a one-year period from a retrospective perspective. However, the sense-making as it unfolds in real-time was not considered in the study. In recent years the micro-genetic approach to investigating real-time sign construction has been re-discovered and gained again importance (see for example Diriwächter & Valsiner, 2008; Wagoner, 2007). Hence, one possible future direction for investigating identity construction as personal sense-making would be to apply a different set of data collection methods that would concentrate on the micro-genetic movements in personal meaning. While the need to be innovative when designing these methods makes this approach somewhat difficult, it would be a very attractive alternative, when combined with the longitudinal multiple-case study design, to the traditional ways of approaching the data collection.

12.2.2 Externalization and personal sense-making

The research project that was reported in the current dissertation examined the personal sense-making episodes and sought to propose a conceptual model that would enable to analyse and interpret these. However, it has to be mentioned, that the study focused mostly on the process of internalization, as it looked into the ways social suggestions were taken up by individuals and integrated into their intra-psychological systems. More precisely, the study worked with the externalizations of the individuals in form of personal discourse, but it sought to infer the internalization process from the externalized material. The complementary process of internalization, namely externalization, was therefore left out from the active investigation.

This choice of focusing on internalization process seems to be prevalent in the contemporary socio-cultural literature and it seems that this limitation within the theoretical field should be addressed. Therefore, one of the possible future directions for this research project would be to concentrate on the

externalization aspect of the personal sense-making, including identity construction. How do the subjective signs become reinforced and modified through person's externalizations? Which other modes of externalization in addition to discourse are used in identity construction? These questions seem to direct the attention towards situations where people are trying to carve out enabling niches for themselves in the context through externalizations. This kind of investigation also seems to require the inclusion of others around the individual to the research, in order to understand the perspective of the other towards individual's externalizations.

While outlined here in broad and vague manner, these questions seem to be one possible way of taking this research project further into other interesting areas of investigation.

12.2.3 Extension of the model to other contexts

The current research project set out to propose a model of identity construction which is universalistic in its nature. The analysis carried out as part of this project shows that the model can indeed be used to interpret identity construction in relation to a variety of content areas as well as in different time and space context.

The current research project focused on the development and initial testing of the proposed model. The model emerged from the analysis of cases and was thereafter further refined and developed using the data from the empirical study. One of the possible future directions in model development would be the testing of certain aspects of the model. This would require a different approach in study design, namely intentional selection of cases that would enable focusing on certain aspects of the model. For example, the notion of rupture seems to be an interesting aspect in the model that could be worked on. Can ruptures be created intentionally to guide sense-making? Would it be possible to use positive ruptures to help people to deal with imposed but undesirable identities? Can ruptures be intentionally created in order to have positive escalating effects on a person's identity construction?

These seem to be interesting and useful research questions to investigate. However, these preliminary ideas need substantive further elaboration to be turned into guiding principles of a future research project.

REFERENCES

- Abbey, E. (2004). Circumventing ambivalence in identity: The importance of latent and overt aspects of symbolic meaning. *Culture & Psychology*, 10(3), 331-336.
- Abbey, E. (2007a). At the boundary of me and you: Semiotic architecture of thinking and feeling the other. In L. M. Simão and J. Valsiner (Eds.), *Otherness in question. Labyrinths of the self*, p. 73-92. Charlotte: Information Age Publishing.
- Abbey, E. (2007b). Perpetual uncertainty of cultural life: Becoming reality. In J. Valsiner and A. Rosa (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of sociocultural psychology*, p. 362-372. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Abbey, E. & Valsiner, J. (2004). Emergence of meanings through ambivalence [58 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research [Online Journal]*. 6(1), Art. 23. Available at: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/1-05/05-1-23-e.htm> [Date of Access: June 20, 2006].
- Ashmore, R., Deaux, K. & McLaughlin-Volpe, T. (2004). An organizing framework for collective identity: Articulation and significance of multidimensionality. *Psychological Bulletin*, 130(1), 80-114.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1986/1993). *Towards a philosophy of the act*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bartel, C. & Dutton, J. (2001). Ambiguous organizational memberships: Constructing organizational identities in interactions with others. In M. A. Hogg and D. J. Terry (Eds.), *Social identity processes in organizational contexts*, p. 115-130. Philadelphia: Psychology Press.
- Bartlett, F. (1932/1995). *Remembering: A study in experimental and social psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bauman, Z. (2001). Identity in the globalising world. *Social Anthropology*, 9(2), 121-129.
- Berg, E. (2002). Local resistance, national identity and global swings in post-Soviet Estonia. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 54(1), 109-122.

-
- Bergson, H. (1907/2005). *Loov evolutsioon [Creative evolution]*. M. Ott and H. Sahkai (Trans.). Tallinn: Ilmamaa. [Estonian translation of Bergson, H., *Euvres. Édition du centenaire*. Presses Universitaires de France, 1959].
- Berry, J. W. (1990). Psychology of acculturation: Understanding individual moving between cultures. In R. W. Brislin (Ed.) *Applied cross-cultural psychology*, p. 232-253. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- Bertau, M.-C. (2007). Encountering objects and others as a means of passage. *Culture & Psychology*, 13(3), 335-352.
- Bhatia, S. (2007). *American karma. Race, culture, and identity in the Indian diaspora*. New York and London: New York University Press.
- Billig, M. (1995). *Banal nationalism*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Dehli: Sage Publications.
- Bourhis, R., Moise, L. C., Perreault, S. & Senecal, S. (1997). Towards an interactive acculturation model: A social psychological approach. *International Journal of Psychology*, 32(6), 369-386.
- Bowen, J. R. (2007). *Why the French don't like headscarves: Islam, the state and public space*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Brewer, M. B. & Gardner, W. (1996). Who is this "we"? Levels of collective identity and self representations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71(1), 83-93.
- Brickson, S. & Brewer, M. (2001). Identity orientation and intergroup relations in organizations. In M. A. Hogg and D. J. Terry (Eds.), *Social identity processes in organizational contexts*, p. 49-65. Philadelphia: Psychology Press.
- Brinkmann, S. (2008). Identity as self-interpretation. *Theory & Psychology*, 18(3), 404-422.
- Brosius, C. & Yazgi, N. (2007). "Is there no place like home?": Contesting cinematographic constructions of Indian Diasporic experiences. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 41(3), 355-386.
- Bruter, M. (2003). Winning hearts and minds for Europe. The impact of news and symbols on civic and cultural European identity. *Comparative Political Studies*, 36(10), 1148-1179.
- Brüggemann, K. (2003). Leaving the 'Baltic' States and 'Welcome to Estonia': Re-regionalising Estonian identity. *European Review of History*, 10(2), 343-360.
-

-
- Burckhardt, J. (1860/2003). *Itaalia renessansikultuur. Üks esituskatse [The civilization of the Renaissance in Italy]*. I. Vene (Trans.). Tallinn: Ilmamaa. [Estonian translation of Burckhardt, J., *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*, Leipzig: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1976].
- Burke, P. J. & Reitzes, D. C. (1991). An identity theory approach to commitment. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 54(3), 239-251.
- Butler, J. (1997). *The psychic life of power: Theories in subjection*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bühler, C. & Massarik, F. (Eds.) (1968). *The course of human life. A study of goals in the humanistic perspective*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Coelho, P. (1999a). *The alchemist: A fable about following your dream*. Thorsons.
- Coelho, P. (1999b). *The pilgrimage: A Contemporary Quest for Ancient Wisdom*. Thorsons.
- Cokley, K. (2007). Critical issues in the measurement of ethnic and racial identity: A referendum on the state of the field. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 54(3), 224-234.
- Cole, M. (1996). *Cultural psychology. A once and future discipline*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Cole, M. & Engeström, Y. (2007). Cultural-historical approaches to designing for development. In J. Valsiner and A. Rosa (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of sociocultural psychology*, p. 484-507. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cooper, M. & Hermans, H. J. M. (2007). Honoring self-otherness. Alterity and intrapersonal. In L. M. Simão and J. Valsiner (Eds.), *Otherness in question: Labyrinths of the self*, p. 305-315. Charlotte: Information Age Publishing.
- Costall, A. (2007). The windowless room: 'Mediationism' and how to get over it. In J. Valsiner and A. Rosa (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of sociocultural psychology*, p. 109-123. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Daniels, H. (1989). Visual displays as tacit relays of the structure of pedagogic practice. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 10(2), 123-140.
- Daniels, H. (1995). Pedagogic practices, tacit knowledge and discursive discrimination: Bernstein and post-Vygotskian research. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 16(4), 517 - 531.
-

-
- Daniels, H. (2001). *Vygotsky and pedagogy*. New York and London: Routledge Falmer.
- Daniels, H. (2007). Discourse and identity in cultural-historical activity theory: A response. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 46(1-2), 94-99.
- Daniels, H., Holst, J., Lunt, I. & Ulsøe-Johansen, L. (1996). A comparative study of the relation between different models of pedagogic practice and constructs of deviance *Oxford Review of Education*, 22(1), 63-77.
- Desai, K. (2006). *The inheritance of loss*. London: Penguin Books.
- Diriwächter, R. & Valsiner, J. (2005). Qualitative developmental research methods in their historical and epistemological contexts [53 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research [Online Journal]*. 7(1), Art. 8. Available at: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/1-06/06-1-8-e.htm> [Date of Access: June 20, 2006].
- Diriwächter, R. & Valsiner, J. (Eds.) (2008). *Striving for the whole: Creating theoretical synthesis*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Dodds, A. E., Lawrence, J. A. & Valsiner, J. (1997). The personal and the social: Mead's theory of the 'generalized other'. *Theory & Psychology*, 7(4), 483-503.
- Donskis, L. (2005). The promise of certainty, safety and security in an uncertain, unsafe and insecure world: the emergence of Lithuanian populism. In D. J. Smith (Ed.) *The Baltic States and their region. New Europe or old?*, p. 143-158. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.
- Edwards, A. (2005). Relational agency: Learning to be a resourceful practitioner. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 43(3), 168-182.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 532-550.
- Engeström, Y. (2000). Activity theory as a framework for analysing and redesigning work. *Ergonomics*, 43(7), 960-974.
- Engeström, Y. (2001). Expansive learning at work: Toward an activity theoretical reconceptualization. *Journal of Education and Work*, 14(1), 133-156.
- Engeström, Y. (2006). Development, movement and agency: Breaking away into mycorrhizae activities. In K. Yamazumi (Ed.) *Building activity theory in practice: Toward the next generation*, p. 1-43. Kansai: Kansai University Press.
-

-
- Engeström, Y. (2007). Putting Vygotsky to work: The change laboratory as an application of double stimulation. In H. Daniels, M. Cole and J. V. Wertsch (Eds.), *The Cambridge companion to Vygotsky*, p. 363-382. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Erikson, E. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York: Norton.
- Falmagne, R. J. (2004). On the constitution of 'self' and 'mind'. *Theory & Psychology*, 14(6), 822-845.
- Farr, R. M. (1996). *The roots of modern social psychology. 1872-1954*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Flyvberg, B. (2001). *Making social science matter. Why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fuhrer, U. (2004). *Cultivating minds. Identity as meaning-making practice*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Fuhrer, U. & Josepshs, I. E. (1998). The cultivated mind: From mental mediation to cultivation. *Developmental Review*, 18(3), 279-312.
- Gergen, K. J. (1989). Warranting voice and the elaboration of the self. In J. Shotter and K. J. Gergen (Eds.), *Texts of identity*, p. 71-81. London, Newbury Park, New Dehli: Sage Publications.
- Giang, M. T. & Wittig, M. A. (2006). Implications of adolescents' acculturation strategies for personal and collective self-esteem. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 12(4), 725-739.
- Gibson, J. J. (1986). *The ecological approach to visual perception*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Gillespie, A. (2003). Supplematarity and surplus: Moving between the dimensions of otherness. *Culture & Psychology*, 9(3), 209-220.
- Gillespie, A. (2005). G.H. Mead: Theorist of the social act. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 35(1), 19-39.
- Gillespie, A. (2006). *Becoming other: From social interaction to self-reflection*. Greenwich: Information Age Publishing.
- Gillespie, A. (2007a). The social basis of self-reflection. In J. Valsiner and A. Rosa (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of sociocultural psychology*, p. 678-691. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gillespie, A. (2007b). Time, self and the other: The striving tourist in Ladakh, North India. In L. M. Simão and J. Valsiner (Eds.), *Otherness in*
-

-
- question. *Labyrinths of the self*, p. 163-186. Charlotte: Information Age Publishing.
- Gillespie, A. (2008 in press). Social representations, alternative representations and semantic barriers. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 38(4), 376-391.
- Glaser, B. G. & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory. Strategies of qualitative research*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Guimarães, D. S. & Simão, L. M. (2007). Intersubjectivity and otherness: A stage for self striving. In L. M. Simão and J. Valsiner (Eds.), *Otherness in question: Labyrinths of the self*, p. 317-347. Charlotte: Information Age Publishing.
- Hamaker, E., L., Dolan, C., V. & Molenaar, P. C. M. (2005). Statistical modeling of the individual: Rationale and application of multivariate stationary time series analysis. *Multivariate Behavioral Research*, 40(2), 207-233.
- Hardy, C., Lawrence, T. B. & Grant, D. (2005). Discourse and collaboration: The role of conversations and collective identity. *Academy of Management Review*, 30(1), 58-77.
- Heidmets, M. (1989). Персонализация в жилой среде: Эмпирическое исследование. [Personalization in domestic environment. Empirical investigation]. In T. Niit, M. Raudsepp and M. Heidmets (Eds.), *Средовые условия развития социальных общностей. [Environmental conditions of the development of social objects]*, p. 27-65. Tallinn: TPedI.
- Helms, J. E. (2007). Some better practices for measuring racial and ethnic identity constructs. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 54(3), 235-246.
- Helms, J. E. & Piper, R. E. (1994). Implications of racial identity theory for vocational psychology. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 44(2), 124-138.
- Hermans, H. J. M. (1995). The limitations of logic in defining the self. *Theory & Psychology*, 5(3), 375-382.
- Hermans, H. J. M. (1996). Voicing the self: From information processing to dialogical interchange. *Psychological Bulletin*, 119(1), 31-50.
- Hermans, H. J. M. (2001). The Dialogical Self: Towards a theory of personal and cultural positioning. *Culture & Psychology*, 7(3), 243-281.
- Hilson, C. (2007). Legitimacy and rights in the EU: Questions of identity. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 14(4), 527-544.
- Hogg, M. A., Terry, D. J. & White, K. M. (1995). A tale of two stories: A critical
-

-
- comparison of identity theory with social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 58(4), 255-269.
- Holland, D. & Lachicotte, W. (2007). Vygotsky, Mead, and the new sociocultural studies of identity. In H. Daniels, M. Cole and J. Wertsch (Eds.), *The Cambridge companion to Vygotsky*, p. 101-135. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Holland, D., Lachicotte, W., Skinner, D. & Cain, C. (2001). *Identity and agency in cultural worlds*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Holland, D. & Lave, J. (Eds.) (2001). *History in person. Enduring struggles, contentious practice, intimate identities*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.
- Holtom, P. (2005). The gatekeeper "hinge" concept and the promotion of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian new/postmodern security agendas. In D. J. Smith (Ed.) *The Baltic States and their region. New Europe or old?*, p. 293-312. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.
- Howard, J. A. (2000). Social psychology of identities. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 367-393.
- Joenniemi, P. (2005). The challenges of "new" and "old": the case of Europe's north. In D. J. Smith (Ed.) *The Baltic States and their region. New Europe or old?*, p. 67-85. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.
- Kim, B. S. K. & Omizo, M. M. (2006). Behavioral acculturation and enculturation and psychological functioning among Asian American college students. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 12(2), 245-258.
- Kirch, M. (2004). Eesti ja Euroopa identiteet [Estonian and European identity]. In A. Valk (Ed.) *Eesti ja eestlased võrdlevas perspektiivis. Kultuuridevahelisi uurimusi 20. sajandi lõpust [Estonia and Estonians from the comparative perspective. Cross-cultural studies from the end of the 20th century]* p. 87-101. Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus.
- Kozulin, A. (1998). *Psychological tools. A sociocultural approach to education*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Kus, L. (2004). *Acculturation, socio-cultural and psychological adaptation of Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia*. T. Niit (Supervisor). Dissertation submitted for the degree of Master of Science in Psychology, Tallinn Pedagogical University.
- Kuus, M. (2007). Ubiquitous identities and elusive subjects: Puzzles from Central Europe. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 32(1), 90-102.
-

-
- Lawrence, J. A. & Valsiner, J. (1993). Conceptual roots of internalization: From transmission to transformation. *Human Development*, 36(1), 150-167.
- Lawrence, J. A. & Valsiner, J. (2003). Making personal sense. An account of basic internalization and externalization processes. *Theory & Psychology*, 13(6), 723-752.
- Lee, D. C. & Quintana, S. M. (2005). Benefits of cultural exposure and development of Korean perspective-taking ability for transracially adopted Korean children. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 11(2), 130-143.
- Lehti, M. (2005). Estonia and Latvia: A "new" Europe challenges the "old"? In D. J. Smith (Ed.) *The Baltic States and their region. New Europe or old?*, p. 87-114. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.
- Levine, D. N. (Ed.) (1971). *Georg Simmel on individuality and social forms. Selected writings*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Licata, L. & Klein, O. (2002). Does European citizenship breed xenophobia? European identification as a predictor of intolerance towards immigrants. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 12(5), 323-337.
- Lotman, Y. (1999). *Semiosfäärist [About semiosphere]*. K. Pruul (Trans.). Tallinn: Vagabund.
- Marcia, J. (1980). Identity in adolescence. In J. Adelson (Ed.) *Handbook of adolescent psychology*, p. 159-187. New York: Wiley.
- Marková, I. (2003a). Constitution of the self: Intersubjectivity and dialogicality. *Culture & Psychology*, 9(3), 249-259.
- Marková, I. (2003b). *Dialogicality and social representations. The dynamics of mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Matusov, E. (1998). When solo activity is not privileged: Participation and internalization models of development. *Human Development*, 41, 326-349.
- Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self and society from the standpoint of a social behaviorist*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Mercer, N. (2000). *Words and minds: How we use language to think together*. London: Routledge.
- Michael, M. (1996). *Constructing identities. The social, the nonhuman and change*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Dehli: Sage Publications.
-

- Molenaar, P. C. M. (2004). A manifesto on psychology as idiographic science: Brining the person back into scientific psychology, this time forever. *Measurement*, 2(4), 201-218.
- Molenaar, P. C. M., Huizenga, H. M. & Nesselroade, J., R. (2002). The relationship between the structure of inter-individual and intra-individual variability. In U. Staudinger and U. Lindenberger (Eds.), *Understanding human development*, p. 339-360. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Molenaar, P. C. M. & Valsiner, J. (2005). How generalization works through the single case: A simple idiographic process analysis of an individual psychotherapy [40 paragraphs]. *International Journal of Idiographic Science [Online Journal]*, Art. 1. Available at: <http://www.valsiner.com/articles/molenvals.htm> [Date of Access: April 4, 2008].
- Molina, L., E., Wittig, M., A. & Giang, M., T. (2004). Mutual acculturation and social categorization: A comparison of two perspectives on intergroup bias. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 7(3), 239-265.
- Moscovici, S. (1998). Social consciousness and its history. *Culture & Psychology*, 4(3), 411-429.
- Moscovici, S. (2007). *Psychoanalysis: Its image and its public*. Malden: Polity Press.
- Moscovici, S. & Marková, I. (1998). Presenting social representations. *Culture & Psychology*, 4(3), 371-410.
- Nagel, J. (2000). Ethnicity and sexuality. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 107-133.
- Negy, C., Shreve, T. L., Jensen, B. J. & Uddin, N. (2003). Ethnic identity, self-esteem, and ethnocentrism: A study of social identity versus multicultural theory of development. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 9(4), 333-344.
- Niens, U. & Cairns, E. (2003). Explaining social change and identity management strategies: New directions for future research. *Theory & Psychology*, 13(4), 489-509.
- Noreen, E. & Sjöstedt, R. (2004). Estonian identity formations and threat framing in the post-cold war era. *Journal of Peace Research*, 41(6), 733-750.
- Parker, I. (1989). Discourse and power. In J. Shotter and K. J. Gergen (Eds.), *Texts of identity*, p. 56-69. London, Newbury Park, New Dehli: Sage Publications.

-
- Penuel, W. R. & Wertsch, J. V. (1995). Vygotsky and identity formation: A sociocultural approach. *Educational Psychologist*, 30(2), 83-92.
- Persky, I. & Birman, D. (2005). Ethnic identity in acculturation research: A study of multiple identities of Jewish refugees from the former Soviet Union. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 36(5), 557-572.
- Peters, B. (2002). A new look at "National Identity". *Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, 43(1), 3-32.
- Phinney, J. S. (1989). Stages of ethnic identity in minority group adolescents. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 9, 34-49.
- Phinney, J. S. (1990). Ethnic identity in adolescents and adults: Review of research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 108(3), 499-514.
- Phinney, J. S., Horenczyk, G., Liebkind, K. & Vedder, P. (2001). Ethnic identity, immigration, and well-being: An interactional perspective. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57(3), 493-510.
- Phinney, J. S. & Ong, A. D. (2007). Conceptualization and measurement of ethnic identity: Current status and future directions. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 54(3), 271-281.
- Piaget, J. (1977). *The grasp of consciousness. Action and concept in the young child*. S. Wedgwood (Trans.). London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Pinxten, R., Cornelis, M. & Rubinstein, R. A. (2007). European identity: Diversity in Union. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 30(6-7), 687-699.
- Quintana, S. M. (1998). Children's developmental understanding of ethnicity and race. *Applied and Preventive Psychology*, 7(1), 27-45.
- Quintana, S. M. (2007). Racial and ethnic identity: Developmental perspectives and research. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 54(3), 259-270.
- Raudsepp, M. (2005). Why is it so difficult to understand the theory of social representations? *Culture & Psychology*, 11(4), 455-468.
- Rogoff, B. (1990). *Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive development in social context*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rogoff, B. (2003). *The cultural nature of human development*. New York: Oxford University Press
-

-
- Rosa, A. (2007a). Acts of psyche. Actuations as synthesis of semiosis and action. In J. Valsiner and A. Rosa (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of sociocultural psychology*, p. 205-237. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rosa, A. (2007b). Dramaturgical Actuations and symbolic communication. Or how beliefs make up reality. In J. Valsiner and A. Rosa (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of sociocultural psychology*, p. 293-317. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Roth, W. M. (2007). The ethico-moral nature of identity: Prolegomena to the development of third-generation Cultural-Historical Activity Theory. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 46(1-2), 83-93.
- Rudmin, F. W. (2003). Critical history of the acculturation psychology of assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. *Review of General Psychology*, 7(1), 3-37.
- Salgado, J. & Gonçalves, M. (2007). The Dialogical Self: Social, personal and (un)conscious. In J. Valsiner and A. Rosa (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of sociocultural psychology*, p. 608-621. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sampson, E. E. (1989). The deconstruction of the self. In J. Shotter and K. J. Gergen (Eds.), *Texts of identity*, p. 1-19. London, Newbury Park, New Dehli: Sage Publications.
- Sato, T., Yasuda, Y., Kido, A., Arakawa, A., Mizoguchi, H. & Valsiner, J. (2007). Sampling reconsidered: Idiographic science and the analysis of personal life trajectories. In J. Valsiner and A. Rosa (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of sociocultural psychology*, p. 82-106. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sawyer, R. K. (2002). Unresolved tensions in sociocultural theory: Analogies with contemporary sociological debates. *Culture & Psychology*, 8(3), 283-305.
- Sfard, A. & Prusak, A. (2005). Telling identities: In search of an analytic tool for investigating learning as a culturally shaped activity. *Educational Researcher*, 34(4), 14-22.
- Shi-xu (2006). Mind, self, and consciousness as discourse. *New Ideas in Psychology*, 24(1), 63-81.
- Shotter, J. (1989). Social accountability and the social construction of 'you'. In J. Shotter and K. J. Gergen (Eds.), *Texts of identity*, p. 133-151. London, Newbury Park, New Dehli: Sage Publications.
-

-
- Shotter, J. & Gergen, K. J. (Eds.) (1989). *Texts of identity*. London, Newbury Park, New Dehli: Sage Publications.
- Slugoski, B. R. & Ginsburg, G. P. (1989). Ego identity and explanatory speech. In J. Shotter and K. J. Gergen (Eds.), *Texts of identity*, p. 36-55. London, Newbury Park, New Dehli: Sage Publications.
- Sovran, T. (1992). Between similarity and sameness. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 18, 329-344.
- Stets, J. E. & Burke, P. J. (2000). Identity theory and social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63(3), 224-237.
- Stetsenko, A. (2005). Activity as object-related: Resolving the dichotomy of individual and collective planes of activity. *Mind, Culture and Activity*, 12(1), 70-88.
- Stetsenko, A. & Arieviditch, I. M. (2004). The self in cultural-historical activity theory. *Theory & Psychology*, 14(4), 475-503.
- Stryker, S. & Burke, P. J. (2000). The past, present, and future of an identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63(4), 284-297.
- Sullivan, P. (2007). Examining the self-other dialogue through "spirit" and "soul". *Culture & Psychology*, 13(1), 105-128.
- Sussman, N. M. (2000). The dynamic nature of cultural identity throughout cultural transitions: Why home is not so sweet. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 4(4), 355-373.
- Terry, D. J. (2001). Intergroup relations and organizational mergers. In M. A. Hogg and D. J. Terry (Eds.), *Social identity processes in organizational contexts*, p. 229-247. Philadelphia: Psychology Press.
- Toomela, A. (2003). Relationships between personality structure, structure of word meaning, and cognitive ability: A study of cultural mechanisms of personality. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85(4), 723-735.
- Toomela, A. (2007). Culture of science: Strange history of the methodological thinking in psychology. *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science*, 41, 6-20.
- Trimble, J. E. (2007). Prolegomena for the connotation of construct use in the measurement of ethnic and racial identity. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 54(3), 247-258.
-

-
- Tulviste, P. (1984). *Mõtlemise muutumisest ajaloos. [About the changes in thinking in the course of history]*. Tallinn: Valgus.
- Turner, J. C. & Reynolds, K. J. (2004). The social identity perspective in intergroup relations: Theories, themes and controversies. In M. B. Brewer and M. Hewstone (Eds.), *Self and social identity*, p. 259-277. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Valk, A. & Karu, K. (2001). Ethnic attitudes in relation to ethnic pride and ethnic differentiation. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 141(5), 583-602.
- Valk, A. & Karu, K. (2004). Eesti identiteet Eestis ja Rootsis [Estonian identity in Estonia and in Sweden]. In A. Valk (Ed.) *Eesti ja eestlased võrdlevas perspektiivis. Kultuuridevahelisi uurimusi 20. sajandi lõpust [Estonia and Estonians from the comparative perspective. Cross-cultural studies from the end of the 20th century]* p. 125-141. Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus.
- Valsiner, J. (1994). James Mark Baldwin and his impact: Social development of cognitive functions. In A. Rosa and J. Valsiner (Eds.), *Explorations in socio-cultural studies. Vol. 1. Historical and theoretical discourse*, p. 187-203. Madrid: Fundación Infancia y Aprendizaje.
- Valsiner, J. (1998). *The guided mind. A sociogenetic approach to personality*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Valsiner, J. (2000). Data as representations: contextualizing qualitative and quantitative research strategies. *Social Science Information*, 39(1), 99-113.
- Valsiner, J. (2001). Process structure of semiotic mediation in human development. *Human Development*, 44, 84-97.
- Valsiner, J. (2002). Forms of dialogical relations and semiotic autoregulation within the self. *Theory & Psychology*, 12(2), 251-265.
- Valsiner, J. (2005). Scaffolding within the structure of Dialogical Self: Hierarchical dynamics of semiotic mediation. *New Ideas in Psychology*, 23(3), 197-206.
- Valsiner, J. (2007a). Baldwin's quest: A universal logic of development. In J. Clegg (Ed.) *From past to future 2007: Annals in the history of psychology*, p. 1-29. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Valsiner, J. (2007b). *Culture in minds and societies: Foundations of cultural psychology*. New Dehli: Sage Publications.
- Valsiner, J. (2007c). Human development as migration: Striving toward the
-

-
- unknown. In L. M. Simão and J. Valsiner (Eds.), *Otherness in question: Labyrinths of the self*, p. 349-378. Charlotte: Information Age Publishing.
- Valsiner, J. (2007d). *Locating the self... Looking for the impossible? Or maybe the impossible is the only possibility...* Paper presented at the international conference 'Culturalization of the Self, December, 1, Chemnitz, Germany.
- Valsiner, J. & Diriwächter, R. (2008). Conclusion: Returning to the whole - a new theoretical synthesis in the social sciences. In R. Diriwächter and J. Valsiner (Eds.), *Striving for the whole: Creating theoretical synthesis*, p. 211-237. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Valsiner, J. & Van der Veer, R. (2000). *The social mind. Construction of the idea*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- van der Veer, R. (1994). Pierre Janet's relevance for a socio-cultural approach. In A. Rosa and J. Valsiner (Eds.), *Explorations in socio-cultural studies. Vol. 1. Historical and theoretical discourse*, p. 205-209. Madrid: Fundación Infancia y Aprendizaje.
- van der Veer, R. & Valsiner, J. (1991). *Understanding Vygotsky: A quest for synthesis*. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers.
- Vandiver, B. J., Cross, W. E., Jr., Worrell, F. C. & Fhagen-Smith, P. E. (2002). Validating the Cross racial identity scale. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 49(1), 71-85.
- Vetik, R. (2003). Élite vs. people? Eurosceptic public opinion in Estonia. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 16(2), 257-271.
- Vihalemm, T. (2004). Eesti keele roll kultuuridevahelises kommunikatsioonis [The role of Estonian language in cross-cultural communication]. In A. Valk (Ed.) *Eesti ja eestlased võrdlevas perspektiivis. Kultuuridevahelisi uurimusi 20. sajandi lõpust [Estonia and Estonians from the comparative perspective. Cross-cultural studies from the end of the 20th century]*, p. 246-261. Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus.
- Vihalemm, T. (2007). Crystallizing and emancipating identities in post-Communist Estonia. *Nationalities Papers*, 35(3), 477-503.
- Vihalemm, T. & Keller, M. (2001). Estonian society carried by the tide of Western consumer culture. *Estonian Human Development Report*, 80-83.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1925/1979). Consciousness as a problem in the psychology of behaviour. *Soviet Psychology*, 17, 5-35.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society. The development of higher psychological*
-

-
- processes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1987). *The collected works of L. S. Vygotsky. Volume I. Problems of general psychology*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1989). Concrete human psychology. *Soviet Psychology*, 27(2), 53-77.
- Wagner, W. (1998). Social representations and beyond: Brute facts, symbolic coping and domesticated worlds. *Culture & Psychology*, 4(3), 297-329.
- Wagoner, B. (2007). Overcoming psychology's methodology: Finding synthesis beyond the American and German–Austrian division. *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science*, 41(1), 60-74.
- Wartofsky, M. (1979). *Models - Representations and the scientific understanding*. Dordrecht and Boston: D. Reidel.
- Weiler, J. H. H. (1997). To be a European citizen - Eros and civilization. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 4(4), 495-519.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice. Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wertsch, J. (2007). Mediation. In H. Daniels, M. Cole and J. Wertsch (Eds.), *The Cambridge companion to Vygotsky*, p. 178-192. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wertsch, J. V. (2002). *Voices of collective remembering*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Worchel, S. & Coutant, D. (2004). It takes two to tango: Relating group identity to individual identity within the framework of group development. In M. B. Brewer and M. Hewstone (Eds.), *Self and social identity*, p. 182-202. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Worchel, S., Iuzzini, J., Coutant, D. & Ivaldi, M. (2000). A multidimensional model of identity: Relating individual and group identities to intergroup behaviour. In D. Capozza and R. Brown (Eds.), *Social identity processes. Trends in theory and research*, p. 15-32. London, Thousand Oaks, New Dehli: Sage Publications.
- Yaroshevsky, M. (1989). *Outstanding Soviet psychologists: Lev Vygotsky*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Yin, R. K. (1981). The case study crisis: Some answers. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 26(1), 58-65.
-

- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods. Third Edition.* Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Zittoun, T. (2004). Symbolic competencies for developmental transitions: The case of the choice of first names. *Culture & Psychology*, 10(2), 131-162.
- Zittoun, T. (2007a). Dynamics of interiority. Ruptures and transitions in the self development. In L. M. Simão and J. Valsiner (Eds.), *Otherness in question. Labyrinths of the self*, p. 187-214. Charlotte: Information Age Publishing.
- Zittoun, T. (2007b). The role of symbolic resources in human lives. In J. Valsiner and A. Rosa (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of sociocultural psychology*, p. 343-361. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zittoun, T. (2007c). Symbolic resources in dialogue, dialogical symbolic resources. *Culture & Psychology*, 13(3), 365-377.
- Zittoun, T., Duveen, G., Gillespie, A., Ivinson, G. & Psaltis, C. (2003). The use of symbolic resources in developmental transitions. *Culture & Psychology*, 9(4), 415-448.

APPENDIX A

INVITATION LETTER SENT TO POTENTIAL STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Dear Student,

According to the information we have received from ... (name of the organization), you are planning to spend some time during the next academic year in the UK as part of your studies. Hereby we invite you to participate in the study which is designed to investigate changes in the identity of Estonian students and their adaptation to the new cultural context. The study will be carried out as part of the doctorate studies of Mariann Märtsin at the University of Bath, Department of Education.

Hereby we provide you with some information about the goals and methodology of the study; explain how the data from the study will be used, point out what you will gain from the participation and give contact information in case you would like to take part in the project

The goals the study

One of the aims of the European Union education policy is to increase the mobility related to studies and research. In relation to that the opportunities for students to complete their studies or spend some period of their studies abroad have noticeably expanded during the last years. More and more students choose to take advantage of those opportunities in order to widen their knowledge and experiences. But what does it mean for an Estonian to study in the UK? What effects does the contact with a new culture have on students' cultural identity? What kinds of changes occur in the self-concept and self-understandings of an

individual while staying abroad? Do the students see themselves to be the same Estonians when they come back home after the stay abroad or has their idea about themselves as Estonians changed? What kind of situations encountered by Estonian students while studying in the UK are difficult for them, which situations are new, which ones funny? And what can the institutions that are responsible of sending students abroad, learn from students' experiences?

The current study is designed to answer those and similar research questions.

The methodology of the study

The study is designed to last one year. During that period two individual interviews will be conducted with each participant – one before the departure to the UK and the other after return home. Both interviews are planned to last approximately 1.5 hours. The aim of the individual interviews is to understand the motives for going to study in the UK and to investigate the self-understandings of a student and the change in those, using techniques designed especially for this study.

In addition to interviews two workshops, involving all the participants of the study, are designed to take place during the period of investigation. The first workshop is planned to take place after individual interviews before the departure to the UK and the second one following individual interviews after the return to Estonia. Both workshops are planned to last approximately 1.5 hours. The aim of the workshops is to investigate the group level understanding of being Estonian and to notice changes that have occurred in those understandings while staying abroad.

The data gathered during individual interviews and workshops should offer an understanding what has changed during the stay abroad. In order to shed some light to the ways these changes have occurred and what events have brought along those changes, the participants will be asked to complete short questionnaires sent to them via e-mail once a month during the entire period of studying abroad. The questionnaire consists of 4-5 sentences that need to be completed and some open-

ended questions about events that have occurred recently in one's life.

Data collection and usage

The individual interviews conducted during the study will be tape-recorded in order to allow the text analysis to be carried out. For the same reason also the workshops will be tape-recorded, as well as video-taped. The latter will enable the investigation of group processes during the workshop.

All the data gathered during the study are treated with strict confidence and will be used only in the context of the present study. In case the research team will find it necessary to use quotations in the final report of the study, in the publications or conference presentations based on the current study, the permission to use the quotation will be asked from the participants and the quotation will be used only if given the permission to do so. In order to keep the anonymity of the participants the pseudonyms will be used when using quotations.

Participation and renouncing the participation

Participation in the study requires taking part in all the stages of the study described above. Therefore every participant takes a responsibility to participate in two individual interviews and two workshops, as well as complete the questionnaire sent to him/her by e-mail.

In case the participant wishes to renounce one's participation, one is asked to inform the research group in writing of one's decision and reasons for making it. This would allow the research group to plan the further activities and prevent us from sending the questionnaires to the participants who no longer expect to receive them.

What do I get out of this?

Participation gives you:

- an opportunity to systematically investigate the change of your self-understandings during a period of half a year and increase your self-

awareness through this;

- obtain all the data related to you gathered during the study (your interview transcripts, copies of exercises used, answers to the questionnaires) for your personal self-analysis, if wanted;
- analyze the data related to you with the researcher during a separate meeting, if wanted;
- meet fellow Estonian students who study in the UK and have valuable contacts with people who are in the similar situation;
- share experiences of staying abroad with people in a similar situation;
- help to increase the academic knowledge base related to cultural identity of Estonians.

In addition, all the participants will receive a voucher of 500.- Estonian croones that could be used to buy books from Apollo Raamatupood.

How to participate?

If you would like to participate in the study, please send an e-mail to Mariann Märtsin to the e-mail address provided below by the 1st of July 2006. Add your contact information so that we could contact you and negotiate the next steps.

Contacts

Mariann Märtsin

University of Bath

Department of Education

Phone: +447783554796

E-mail: M.Martsin@bath.ac.uk

Your participation is essential!

Thank you in advance,

Mariann Märtsin

APPENDIX B

SELF-DESCRIPTION EXERCISE

COMMON WORDS USED FOR

SELF-DESCRIPTION

Vaikne – Calm

Kinnine – Reserved

Edasipürgiv – Pushing Forward

Kangekaelne – Pigheaded

Töökas – Hard-Working

Kade – Envious

Pika vihaga – Vindictive

Sitke – Tenacious

Sõbralik – Friendly

Teistsugune – Different

Silmatorkamatu – Unnoticeable

Nutikas – Clever

Ilus – Pretty

Loodust armastav – Nature Loving

Traditsioone järgiv – Tradition Following

Eestlane – Estonian

Põhjamaalane – Nordic

Skandinaavlane – Scandinavian

Ida-Eurooplane – Eastern-European

Üliõpilane – Student

APPENDIX C

MONTHLY QUESTIONNAIRES

GENERAL INSTRUCTION AND

COMMON QUESTIONS

General instruction

Research Project „Estonian student in the UK“

Please answer to the following questions as thoroughly as possible. Write down the first thoughts that come to your mind when reading the question and do not spend time on modifying and editing your answers. I am mostly interested in your spontaneous thoughts and feelings, not as much in highly edited text.

Your answers are confidential and will be used only in the context of the current study.

Common questions

Questionnaire 1 – October 2006

1. What kind of important events have happened in your life during the last two weeks? Why were these events significant? Please describe your thoughts and feelings related to those events.
2. Please describe a situation from the last two weeks where you felt different from the people around you. Please describe your thoughts and feelings in that situation. What do you think about that situation now, looking back?
3. Please describe a situation from the last two weeks that was difficult for you.

Please describe your thoughts and feelings in that situation. How did you handle that situation? What do you think about that situation now, looking back?

4. Please describe a situation from the last two weeks that was new or unexpected for you. Why was this situation new and unexpected? How did you feel in that situation? What were you thinking? How did you behave? What do you think about that situation now, looking back?

Questionnaire 2 – November 2006

1. What kind of important events have happened in your life during the last month? Why were these events significant? Please describe your thoughts and feelings related to those events.
2. Please describe a situation from the last month where you felt different from the people around you. Please describe your thoughts and feelings in that situation. What do you think about that situation now, looking back?
3. How often have you been in contact with your family and friends in Estonia over the last month? What have these contacts meant to you? How would you describe your relationships with family and friends at the moment?

Questionnaire 3 – December 2006

1. What kind of important events have happened in your life during the last month? Why were these events significant? Please describe your thoughts and feelings related to those events.
2. Please describe a situation from the last month that was difficult for you. Please describe your thoughts and feelings in that situation. How did you handle that situation? What do you think about that situation now, looking back?
3. What are you planning to do during Christmas holidays? Are you staying in England or going back to Estonia? If you intend to go to Estonia, what do you plan to do while there? Who do you definitely want to meet during your visit? If you intend to stay in England, what do you plan to do? Who do you plan to

spend you holidays with?

Questionnaire 4 – January 2007

1. Please describe your activities during the last month as thoroughly as possible. What kind of important events have happened in your life? Why were these events significant?
2. Please describe the latest situation where you had an argument with someone. Who did you argue with? What was the argument about? Please describe that situation and your feelings and thoughts in that situation as thoroughly as possible.
3. What does home mean to you? Please write down your thoughts and feelings as thoroughly as possible.
4. What do you remember from the video that we watched together during the focus group last autumn? Please write down everything you recall as precisely and thoroughly as possible.

Questionnaire 5 – February 2007

1. Please describe your activities and related thoughts and feelings from the last month as if you were writing to your best friend.
2. Please describe your typical week. What kind of activities are you engaged with during a day? What do you do during your spare time? Who do you spend your spare time with?

Questionnaire 6 – March 2007

1. Please describe your activities and related thoughts and feelings from the last month as if you were writing to your best friend.
2. Please write down five positive and five negative events that happened to you in the last month.
3. How often have you been in contact with your family and friends in Estonia over the last month? What have these contacts meant to you? How would you

describe your relationships with family and friends at the moment?

Questionnaire 7 – May 2007

1. Please describe your activities during the last month as thoroughly as possible. What kind of important events have happened in your life? Why were these events significant?
2. Please describe a situation from the last month that was difficult for you. Please describe your thoughts and feelings in that situation. How did you handle that situation? What do you think about that situation now, looking back?
3. What do you remember from the video that we watched together during the focus group last autumn? Please write down everything you recall as precisely and thoroughly as possible.

Questionnaire 8 – June 2007

1. Please describe your activities during the last month as thoroughly as possible. What kind of important events have happened in your life? Why were these events significant?
2. How often have you been in contact with your family and friends in Estonia over the last month? What have these contacts meant to you? How would you describe your relationships with family and friends at the moment?
3. Please describe a situation from the last month where you felt different from the people around you. Please describe your thoughts and feelings in that situation. What do you think about that situation now, looking back?
4. To what extent did you follow the events circling around the ‘bronze soldier’ that took place in Tallinn in April/May? What did you think and feel? What do you think about that situation now, looking back?
5. What are your plans for the summer? Please describe as precisely as possible when do you intend to be in England and when you are somewhere else. It will help me to plan our final meeting in July or August.

Questionnaire 9 – July 2007

1. Please describe your activities during the last month as thoroughly as possible.
What kind of important events have happened in your life? Why were these events significant?
2. Please describe a situation from the last month that was unexpected or surprising for you. Please describe your thoughts and feelings in that situation.
What do you think about that situation now, looking back?

Every questionnaire ended with the following open-ended question:

If you would like to add something about your experiences over the last month, please write your thoughts down here:

APPENDIX D

SENTENCE COMPLETION EXERCISE

BEGINNINGS OF THE SENTENCES

The sentence completion exercise was added to the 1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th, and 9th questionnaire. The first four beginnings of the sentences were included to all of those questionnaires. The final beginning was added only to the 7th and 9th questionnaire.

Estonians are ...

Estonia is ...

For an Estonian student in the UK it is ...

Lately I feel ...

My life is lately ...

APPENDIX E

SENTENCE COMPLETION EXERCISE

ANSWERS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Table E1. A.'s answers to sentence completion exercise

	Sept. 2006 INT	Oct. 2006 QUEST	Nov. 2006 QUEST	Dec. 2006 QUEST	Jan. 2007 (end) QUEST	March 2007 QUEST	April 2007 (begin.) QUEST	April 2007 (end) INT	May 2007 QUEST	June 2007 QUEST	Aug. 2007 QUEST	Sept. 2007 INT
Estonians are...		Familiar. Quite nice.		Somewhat conservative people. And it bothers me		A bit mad characters			Peaceful characters even if somewhat peripheral in their thinking		Quite good performers	
Estonia is...		Small dear country		Mad country – there are good and positive directions and good perspectives, but also very poor tendencies, especially in relation to the development of democracy etc.		Dear country where mad people live			Beautiful country		Considering its latest policies – a nonsense country. But the nature and environment there is beautiful and special and also the people, taken individually, are quite nice	
For an Estonian student in the UK it is...		Really nice to live and study		Useful to study and in general nice to be		Quite ok to live			Quite ok to live and be		Really useful to study and nice to be	
Lately I feel ...		Diligent and hard-working		Quite well		Relatively committed			Well		Very nice	
My life is lately...									Very nice		Super-trooper!	

Table E2. E.'s answers to sentence completion exercise

	Sept. 2006 INT	Oct. 2006 QUEST	Nov. 2006 QUEST	Dec. 2006 QUEST	Jan. 2007 QUEST	Feb. 2007 QUEST	March 2007 QUEST	April 2007 INT	June 2007 (begin.) QUEST	June 2007 (end) QUEST	July 2007 QUEST	Sept. 2007 INT
Estonians are...		More sincere, honest, decent and human than many other nations		Still better educated and more decent than many other nations		Sometimes too cold and numb			Sincere, honest and very nice people		Character-wise very different from English and French for example. Most Estonians are still sincere, helpful and kind. Who needs so much arrogance, gossip and pretending as you find here? Of course I am already used to it and accept it	
Estonia is...		Too small to spend one's entire life there		Lately has developed very prosperously in all fields of life		Life there is somehow better organized than in London			Has become known lately. People even know where Estonia is!		Has become even quieter and calmer. My friends are wailing constantly that their lives have become exhausted there and have become boring, and the choices are limited	
For an Estonian student in the UK it is...		Sometimes difficult (depends of course on the financial situation of the student or his/her parents). However, this difficulty is outweighed by the interesting life that is full of opportunities		Very good experience for life, because you have to make decisions and take responsibility for your actions		Interesting to live here. In terms of studying I think it is easier here than in Estonia			Very interesting to live here. So many opportunities		The studies are actually relatively easy. I am still afraid that the courses here are much shorter and easier. For example my summer holidays last three and a half months	
Lately I feel ...		More and more viable, successful and taken by the fast speed of life here		Somewhat lonely, but more secure in this environment, because I know already quite a bit of how life here works		Less fearful (if I don't like something, I am not afraid to change it)			Very popular ;), I have met many new people lately		Somewhat guilty, because I haven't been to Estonia for a long time. Parents and friends are asking for me to go and visit them, but to be honest I don't feel like it now	
My life is lately...									More and more secure. I know who I am, what and how I am doing		Has been very nice and easy lately. It is not that busy anymore and I haven't had to worry about money for a long while now	

Table E3. H.'s answers to sentence completion exercise

	Aug. 2006 INT	Oct. 2006 QUEST	Nov. 2006 QUEST	Dec. 2006 QUEST	Jan. 2007 INT	Jan. 2007 (end) QUEST	Feb. 2007 QUEST	March 2007 QUEST	April 2007 QUEST	May 2007 QUEST	June 2007 QUEST	July 2007 QUEST	July (end) 2007 INT
Estonians are ...		Reserved, selfish, achievement oriented, materialistic, not helpful. Also sticking together, calm, dear, supportive, spiritual.		Educated, calm, interesting, pretty, value silence and being alone, planning, caring.			Reserved, superficial, pessimistic, smart, depressing, caring.			Calm, reserved, impulsive, conscientious, sticking together.		Reserved, calm, career-oriented, caring.	
Estonia is ...		Small country in Europe that needs to constantly prove itself and distinguish itself. Estonia is my home. When I think of it, I think of nature – forests and the sea, snow, autumn, my country house. Thinking of Estonia makes me feel warm and home-sick.		A rapidly developing and changing country, my home.			Cold, grey and socially regressed country			Small country that needs to fight for its autonomy and rights.		Small, developing country where the economic growth is still more important than the social welfare (just like it is still more important for Estonians).	
For Estonian student in the UK it is ...		Easy. Most Estonians are fluent in English, differently from Spanish and French students. Estonians may be more reserved and calm, but it is easy to make friends here. The possibilities here in terms of different activities are endless.		Relatively simple and offers very many opportunities.			Simple, interesting, good.			Interesting, offers self-development opportunities, manifold, supportive life.		Easy to manage and in the case of interest offers many opportunities and challenges in different areas of life.	
Lately I feel ...		In a relatively floating mood. Very happy about the country, people, university and activities. But sometimes very sad that I have to be so far from home. However, most of the time I am happy with my life.		I am experiencing contradictory feelings. I love Estonia and my home, but I am not sure I want to live there also in the future.			Empty.			Relatively ordinary.		Very well.	
My life is lately ...										Calm, one-sided, stable.		Has been very happy.	

Table E4. L.'s answers to sentence completion exercise

	Aug. 2006 INT	Oct. 2006 QUEST	Nov. 2006 QUEST	Dec. 2006 QUEST	Jan. 2007 QUEST	Feb. 2007 QUEST	March 2007 QUEST	April 2007 INT	May 2007 QUEST	June 2007 QUEST	July 2007 QUEST	Aug. 2007 INT
Estonians are...		Nice people who now, that we are part of EU, like to travel around. Just like us, who we are participating in this study. If we didn't like it, we would be sitting in our secure home, which also shows that Estonians are curious. They want to know what happens elsewhere in the world. As we are a small nation, we are proud of ourselves, because it is great to be Estonian. This makes us perhaps also more hard-working in comparison with other nations, because we know that in order to achieve our goals, we need to work hard. We are also tenacious nation, we don't whine if we meet obstacles, because we can find also from the past situations when we survived the tough times and continued successfully afterwards.		Nice people. But they should be braver to express their unique identity and not be that much influenced by external events. Estonians should handle their 'own business' and not look that much back to the past and hold on to it. We need to let go of the past and use fully our future potential and not to blot our image with senseless disgraceful things. We cannot compromise Estonian pride on international arena and for that each and every Estonian has to contribute, think globally and find the most suitable way for Estonia.		Nice, determined and tradition following nation. The Independence Day celebrations passed in elated mood both here and there. Looking at the internet sites it seemed that everybody had taken the celebrations very seriously. I am glad that Estonians are so proud of their country. You can feel the sense of togetherness also here in England. We stick together here which doesn't mean that we go everywhere together, but we are informed about each other and get in touch and meet when needed.			In sum, an interesting nation who despite of the times still continues its journey. Also the last month's events related to the 'bronze soldier' have demonstrated the national pride and determination of Estonians that none of the conquerors can take away from us. It's nice to see that EU and world's largest nations are supporting us against the attacks from Russia. With these statements I do not want to be disrespectful towards the soldiers, who are buried to Tõnismäe, but the noise surrounding this statue is unacceptable to every Estonian and therefore I support the relocation of the monument and hope that all Estonians are there for each other during these difficult times and do not answer to the Russian-minded provocations.		In general very nice people, moving slowly and steadily towards becoming citizens of the world with wide horizons, and not remaining stubborn nationalists. With this I don't want to say that grass is greener there. Rather I'd like to say that people should be more open towards new things, but at the same time they should not accept 'euro' unconditionally, because new experiences and information can enrich our traditions, give the basis for improvement. Our unique relics, that are truly valuable, should be kept precious. But you need wide horizons, given by open-mindedness, in order to differentiate between important and unimportant.	

Table E4 (continued). L.'s answers to sentence completion exercise

	Aug. 2006 INT	Oct. 2006 QUEST	Nov. 2006 QUEST	Dec. 2006 QUEST	Jan. 2007 QUEST	Feb. 2007 QUEST	March 2007 QUEST	April 2007 INT	May 2007 QUEST	June 2007 QUEST	July 2007 QUEST	Aug. 2007 INT
Estonia is...		<p>A wonderland where everything has started to function and develop rapidly after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Without a doubt Estonia is a land of opportunities. The figures of economic development are fantastic, but they have little impact worldwide, because we don't have human resources, that would give a stronger basis for our success. However, that doesn't stop us from being an example for others how to manage things effectively in a small country, so that people can enjoy living there.</p> <p>However, everything is not as bright as I described above. ... There are also bottlenecks, for example the social care, low wages, compared to other EU countries etc. But we cannot complain, because the development has been very fast in the last 15 years and if it would continue as rapidly and also in a sustainable manner, we would soon be closer to other European welfare societies. At the same time I can't say that the problems in Estonia and in Great Britain are that different. The problems are the same, just the grasp is different. A constant newspaper topic here is the NHS (a local healthcare system that is underfinanced) that is rather similar to the problems of Estonian healthcare system. So the grass is not that much greener here compared to Estonia.</p> <p>Also crime and homelessness rate is worrying here. And the number of illiterate and uneducated people is higher here than in Estonia. So it raises a question whether this is a well-fare society or not and how much better it is to live here, compared to Estonia?</p>		<p>Still a wonderland, where everything is possible. Unfortunately both in positive and in negative sense. However, we have developed and need to keep the same track! Estonia still has the potential for great and rapid development. The current politicians should deeply investigate and analyze what is best for Estonia in long-run and act accordingly. Selfishness has to be pushed to the background.</p>		<p>A nice country where everything is possible. Lately I don't like too much the fuzz about the upcoming elections reflected in media. I don't like this race for power and hopefully the elected politicians will not gamble away Estonia and its potential. Because when racing only for the power the most important goals will go unnoticed and Estonian reputation can be compromised in international arena, that is damaging to our sustainable development.</p>			<p>Still a wonderland as I have mentioned many times previously. Here everything is possible. Even if we have developed a lot and left the situation of the Soviet Union far behind, some processes are still in early stages of development. Sadly I have to admit that there are huge integration problems in Estonia that became clear during the April/May events circling around the 'bronze soldier'. Something has to be done, because that majority-minority nation that lives on our territory is not going anywhere. We need to deal with them, talk to them so that they would learn to trust Estonian media and not the information that comes from Russia that is biased towards Estonians. All this only creates unnecessary tensions. I hope soon it is again peaceful to live in Estonia.</p>		<p>A special country that is my homeland and that I love deeply. While we have been great during the last 16 years when we have been able to taste the sweetness of freedom, I wouldn't say that everything is fine here. I am deeply worried that some people in Estonia do not care what they are doing or how their behaviour is affecting Estonian reputation. People are rather interested in their own success and position. Even if we deny belonging to developing countries, in my opinion we are exactly that, if not in all sectors of life, then in many fields. It is true that we have many beautiful places and organizations with nice, intelligent and open-minded personnel, you can also meet the other extreme. Apparent innovativeness is accompanied by bare stupidity and unnecessary waste of scarce state resources. However, it is understandable. Even if I do not want to be too critical, then improving certain processes takes a lot of time, in worst cases about a century when many generations have changed and the truly Estonian traditions have found their place and being admired again.</p>	

Table E4 (continued). L.'s answers to sentence completion exercise

	Aug. 2006 INT	Oct. 2006 QUEST	Nov. 2006 QUEST	Dec. 2006 QUEST	Jan. 2007 QUEST	Feb. 2007 QUEST	March 2007 QUEST	April 2007 INT	May 2007 QUEST	June 2007 QUEST	July 2007 QUEST	Aug. 2007 INT
For Estonian student in the UK it is...		Very good opportunities to get a comprehensive education, because we come from a small country and can see the world problems from a different angle compared to people from big nations. Perhaps we understand better why certain things happen in the world, can sympathise with other small countries and comprehend their goals.		Very good to study and great opportunities to develop. In addition to the formal education in different fields, one cannot underestimate the value of widening horizons and getting life experience. Similarly to the UK, studying in a foreign country is a good opportunity for Estonians, because sadly the 50 years under Soviet rule has left its scars on Estonia that can be cured only by re-building a new country with new goals, using new experiences.		Great opportunities for self-improvement. Just couple of days ago I was thinking that isn't it wonderful that Estonia is part of EU, because otherwise our tuition fee would be 10 000 pounds and Estonian students would not feel that fine here, because probably we just wouldn't be here. I was also contemplating about the multi-lingualism, because talking to my friends I can often hear how lucky we are coming from a small country and knowing so many languages. English people usually speak only their own language and the second language is considered to be a huge advantage also in the labour market. Estonian student already studies in a foreign language and in addition to the mother tongue usually knows another or other two-three languages. The academic knowledge you get from here is the same for English and others, but Estonian student gets to combine his/her other language skills with the school subjects and therefore gains an advantage. In sum I can once again say that it is very good for Estonian students to study in the UK.			Once again great opportunities for self-development. In addition to becoming fluent in English and gaining scholastic knowledge, the horizons widen and critical analytic skills develop significantly here. As there are so many different nations here in the UK, all with their specific cultural background and worldviews, understanding their point of views widens also your own horizons and makes the concept of the world more holistic as you realize that there are other ways of living. All this is very enriching.		Again great opportunities for self-development and for studying. In addition to scholastic knowledge you improve the language skills, and create a wide network of friends without any national or racial boundaries. Right now I would not change this experience for anything. I warmly recommend this to others, who have an opportunity and courage to realize their dream of good education. I feel that personally and mentally I have developed a lot during the last two years and gained a lot of life experience, that I probably never have gained when staying at home.	

Table E4 (continued). L.'s answers to sentence completion exercise

	Aug. 2006 INT	Oct. 2006 QUEST	Nov. 2006 QUEST	Dec. 2006 QUEST	Jan. 2007 QUEST	Feb. 2007 QUEST	March 2007 QUEST	April 2007 INT	May 2007 QUEST	June 2007 QUEST	July 2007 QUEST	Aug. 2007 INT
Lately I feel ...		Quite good!!!!!! :) I feel that the problems, that happily there are only few, are starting to find their solution and the life is getting back on the right tracks and moving on smoothly with a somewhat anxious, but also calm speed, so that everything is under control. I also like my subjects in the university – I am happy about my module choices and enjoy studying completely. We've also made up the lost time with my friends and got on the same wavelength again. The importance of the friends cannot be underestimated here, because to a certain extent they substitute the family. Even if I am always in contact with my family, physically they are not here and that makes the friends here very important. My friends here are like my family that bring a sunshine into each of my days, even when it is raining (compared to the last autumn it is raining too much, but that will not affect my mood) :)		Fine. I'm happy that I could come home for the holidays and see again my loved-ones!		Very happy. In the first question, I answered that I've found my emotional balance thanks to my boyfriend, on who I can always rely and be sure of. Thanks to that I can concentrate on other things. And that is just great.			Relatively calm. Even if in the mean time, about a month ago, it was very difficult, I even felt depressed every now and then. But now the sky is turning blue again, the clouds are fading away and the sun is starting to shine again. Hopefully especially after the exams when the summer is here again and I can go home after a very long time, because I really want to see my friends and family again. I can say that the emotional and mental balance that I lost at some point is starting to come back. I'm taking things more easily and concentrate only on myself. And as they say, the happiness comes through inner balance and I do feel that the more balanced I am the more joyful are my days.		Much better. The strength is starting to come back and I can do the things I could not do in the mean time. As I said before, I am trying to get involved only with things that I am truly interested in and first and foremost enjoy the company of my loved-ones.	
My life is lately ...									Somewhat bouncing. I am very busy at school and the school is getting more and more difficult. The second year is quite mad. And based on my friends' experience, I don't even want to think about the third year. So my life circles mostly around studies, but the problems in personal life mess things up a bit and then I have to push extra to re-establish and maintain the balance. But at least it's interesting.		Has been quite unpredictable. Mostly, the small setback with my health that affected all my other activities. But fortunately I haven't needed to cancel anything, all the things are moving more steadily, but still in the right direction. I am very happy about my internship and also the driving school is an enriching experience. I am enjoying even more the company of my family and friends and appreciate the strong ties with them, that is worth more than a chat with some acquaintances.	

Table E5. N.'s answers to sentence completion exercise

	Sept. 2006 INT	Oct. 2006 QUEST	Nov. 2006 QUEST	Jan. 2007 (begin.) QUEST	Feb. 2007 (begin.) QUEST	Feb. 2007 (end) QUEST	March 2007 QUEST	April 2007 INT	May 2007 QUEST	June 2007 QUEST	July 2007 QUEST	Aug. 2007 INT
Estonians are...		My people		Enterprising and practical		Enterprising and educated			Good people		My people	
Estonia is...		Beautiful natural place		My home		My home			My home		Home	
For Estonian student in the UK...		Smart and capable		I don't know other students. Can only talk about myself... interesting.		Interesting and sometimes difficult, but definitely worthy			Quite nice. At least here in London		Interesting. Good experience. Eye-opening experience	
Lately I feel...		Tired. I wish time would stop		Relaxed		Normally. If I am organised, I feel better			Stressed. I'm waiting for the 4th of June to start enjoying the summer		A bit worried, because I'm waiting for exam results	
My life is lately...									Fast and nervous		Calm	

Table E6. P.'s answers to sentence completion exercise

	Aug. 2006 INT	Oct. 2006 QUEST	Nov. 2006 QUEST	Dec. 2006 QUEST	Jan. 2007 QUEST	March 2007 (begin.) QUEST	March 2007 (end) QUEST	April 2007 INT	May 2007 QUEST	Sept. 2007 INT
Estonians are...		Nice, sometimes a bit stubborn and need their private space, but otherwise quite sociable and successful.		Nice guys.		Quite arrogant, stubborn, obstinate, but still – in their own sweet way and especially in some critical situations – caring and very honest. Especially in relation to the 'deep' indifference and superficiality, that is annoyingly starting to emerge behind those 'thanks' and 'sorry'. In some ways Estonians are very naive.			Sometimes really upstart.	
Estonia is ...		Extremely lucky, because compared to the rest of the world this is a tiny country, that no-one has heard of and it is just a fortune that our colourful and confusing history has culminated with independence.		Very ambitious and forward-pushing country.		A country that has hope.			A phenomenon. A phenomenon.	
For Estonian student in the UK it is...		Easy to manage because the language skills are good and European customs familiar. Also the level of teaching is not too difficult, suitable for me. And Estonians are better educated, have more experience and wider horizons compared to an average student, especially because often they have worked while studying.		In general easy to manage, but the horizon of Estonian students' is very narrow compared to many others. We think we are the centre of the world, but actually have not even seen the world.		Difficult, even if easier compared to some others. Little by little interesting things are starting to appear. The boyfriend of one of my Canadian parallel course-mates, who is carpenter, described me last weekend how 'speakers' are settling their accounts in corridors in a deeply social-class-driven manner. The life is not easy even for them. But Estonians have so much to return to when identity and self-esteem are starting to disappear – Estonian music, gherkins and dry smelt were very much appreciated in our independence day party.			Both easy and difficult – easy because we are so to say Europe – common topics, regulations, position in world politics; difficult because locals do not take this Europe seriously, because it is so small and unnoticeable country. Aaarghh ... I'm starting to degenerate and can't say anything original anymore. Shit! Actually ... looking at this event in the Estonian Embassy. It seems to me that Estonian students are very successful. Even too successful. I didn't like those people there. At least those who opened their mouths. I preferred to keep my mouth shut. It's not like me, but that company did not invite me to express my opinion.	
Lately I feel ...		Very tired.		Well, I've had crises of motivation for the last couple of months, because I don't know where to go. I'll write about it in January questionnaire.		Still tired.			Increasingly capable and back in my usual busy life (not anymore, but I'll write about it in the next questionnaire).	
My life is lately...									Continues with an increasing panicking about my future that culminated in my decision not to think about it before the exams are over and I've planned the stuff for my final project. Worrying about three problems is simply too much. And the solutions appeared from where I least expected.	

Table E7. R.'s answers to sentence completion exercise

	Aug. 2006 INT	Oct. 2006 QUEST	Nov. 2006 QUEST	Dec. 2006 QUEST	Jan. 2007 QUEST	Feb. 2007 QUEST	April 2007 (begin.) QUEST	April 2007 INT	May 2007 QUEST	July 2007 QUEST	Oct. 2007 INT
Estonians are...		Persistent, inventive, adapting, intelligent, refine behaving, (it is a generalization based on my Estonian friends in England, but it is very clear in contrast to English). Yes, I am starting to have better opinion about Estonians (especially Estonian men).		Quite similar to English. Perhaps a bit more liberal and loudish. In England everybody is always polite and apologizes.		More direct and deeper than Brits. Less nonsense talking. And Estonians are more willing to become personal, take others more into their heart.			Quite liberal, somewhat vulgar. But still quite restrained and dignified.		
Estonia is...		Taking into account its short independence has made a considerable leap in development towards Europe, keeping its characteristics that stem from Estonian temperament, in comparison with the rest of Europe.		Cosy and nice place, but too small in every respect to live the whole life here.		Compared to England somewhat significantly different – there is much more nature. Estonia is more country-like. But I have said this many times – Estonia is too small.			A model for other small countries of how to develop one's independence and grow economically.		
For an Estonian student in the UK it is...		It is relatively easy to manage due to English skills, and the tolerance and friendliness of locals (because their character is relatively similar to Estonians they don't come across as obtrusive). However, it is clear that they look at East-Europeans with a certain interest and compassion, don't take them completely as equals. I don't feel direct disparagement.		Thanks to Estonians' good language and adaptation skills relatively easy to manage. Because of the cultural background, ordinary Estonian is not extraordinary for Brits.		Initially definitely difficult, but Estonians are hard-working and adapting. So it's okay.			Perhaps it is difficult to find friends who match your temperament and character. Estonian needs a deeper emotional connection than perhaps some more temperamental and superficial people.		
Lately I feel ...		More independent, more cosmopolitan, sometimes happier. Due to my nationality slightly more inferior. More impassive for example about Estonian yellow press news. Academically slightly more helpless and less smart (I haven't yet had a chance to show anybody with who or what they are dealing with).		(Based on the current situation) nervous and worrisome – because of my essay. I can't think to anything else, really. But in general, more independent, I want more privacy. I can't stand it anymore if somebody is poking their nose into my affairs and organizes things for me. I feel also a bit more self-confident. Feeling of progress that I have another place to go to.		A bit more distanced from Estonians. Probably because I have started to go out with people from other nationalities and the national boundaries have started to play less significant role. I don't miss my Estonian friends so badly. I am starting to have another life here.			Again somewhat uncertain, because I don't know the results of the essays yet and haven't seen a friendly face for a while.		
My life is lately...									Has been full of work. I haven't even had time to reflect, just have to act.		

Table E8. T.'s answers to sentence completion exercise

	Sept. 2006 INT	Oct. 2006 QUEST	Nov. 2006 QUEST	Jan. 2006 (begin.) QUEST	Jan. 2007 (end) QUEST	March 2007 (begin.) QUEST	March 2007 (end) QUEST	April 2007 INT	May 2007 QUEST	July 2007 QUEST	Aug. 2007 QUEST	Sept. 2007 INT
Estonians are ...		Hard-working and good... as a nation they stick together... and usually don't forget their homeland... hmmm I don't know what else to add, we talked a lot about this in the interview		Great patriots and they love their culture... you could hear that when listening to the President's speech on New Years Eve... when he once again talked about the Estonian independence... and also that we are members of EU and NATO... Estonians are also proud... But the fuss about the statue in Tõnismäe made me nervous again... as if there is nothing better to do in Parliament... to decide whether to relocate the statue or not... I noticed that people in Estonia are more worrisome and not certain about their future... I felt less positivity, than here... people here are taking things more easily and they have more optimism... this is what the Government should think about... how to make life better... not to create tension between Estonians and Russians with this statue issue... it is constantly on the TV		Sometimes slightly racist... certainly patriotic... that is very good... but they shouldn't overkill... in general a nice nation... different from everybody else				Today for some reason I don't know what to write... But this summer I happened to be in a summer camp of this Estonian party and one evening they were discussing this resistance between Estonians and Russians and the April events... and they were thinking about the differences between these two nations that need to be taken into account... and where the problems lay... and what can be done to better understand each other... and all this talk took place in two languages and I was so happy to see Estonians and Russians together trying to find a solution, and being so close together without any barriers, not even a language barrier... So what are my thoughts about that: Estonians are different from all other nations, and every nation is unique... but the differences should not be obstacles in communication... they should rather be enriching... this is what I am experiencing here in England... I am surrounded by all these different people but we feel so good together and our differences are enriching our relationships... and everybody can be as they are...		
Estonia is ...		Small but very special country... there are things that need to be improved and changed... the development has been very clear in recent years... Estonia is my homeland and it matters to me what is going on there...		Very special small country... truly a place that I recommend my new friends here to visit... again I was wondering around in Tallinn Old Town with my ex-boyfriend and those streets in Old Town are just amazing... Not like the streets here... I didn't want to leave the Old Town, because it was so nice there... I took photos to show my friends... there are many places in Estonia that are very special for which I want to visit them again and again... and not as a visitor, but to come to home!!!		Hmmm, well it is my homeland... and at the moment I really want to go home... I want to rest... eat my mother's food... and see my family... and hopefully stay in the nature a bit...				A wonderful country... and my homeland... and home is the place you always want to return... and things are getting better in Estonia... I am happy about that		

Table E8 (continued). T.'s answers to sentence completion exercise

	Sept. 2006 INT	Oct. 2006 QUEST	Nov. 2006 QUEST	Jan. 2006 (begin.) QUEST	Jan. 2007 (end) QUEST	March 2007 (begin.) QUEST	March 2007 (end) QUEST	April 2007 INT	May 2007 QUEST	July 2007 QUEST	Aug. 2007 QUEST	Sept. 2007 INT
For Estonian student in the UK it is...		Hmmm, a bit difficult in the beginning, but you adjust quickly... and Estonian students are usually successful here... because they come here with the aim to learn		It's not too difficult... I adjusted very quickly... I have HOME STUDENT status here so I wasn't even allowed to the international students' forum... they called and told me that I am from EU and do not need to come... And I think Estonians don't have many problems with English... So it is not all bad... but it depends on the person... I know many Estonians from my university and they are all doing well		It is quite nice and amusing here... you can meet different people... you get in touch with different cultures and that is very interesting... and your attitude towards everything changes a bit... BUT WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT, THE STUDENT LIFE HERE IN [...] IS ONE OF THE BEST... I enjoy it fully ☺				Sometimes difficult, especially money-wise... otherwise nice... the experience abroad only enriches and broadens your horizons and makes you think to all sorts of things... at least that is how I feel... or perhaps it is all related to me getting older and spending more time contemplating ☹☹☹ I don't know... contemplating about life... about people... how they live here and how things are at home... what I want from my life... I don't have answers yet... the time will tell what is going to happen...		
Lately I feel ...		Quite well... I adjusted quickly... and to be honest I can't say that I'm so enthused by England... I haven't yet experienced anything that made me wondered or love England... I like my university and today my personal tutor showed us all the labs we are going to use... I liked that... everything was great... so in terms of studies I'm very HAPPY, HAPPY (written in English) to be here... I've also made many friends here... and it's very interesting for me to be here in this multi-cultural environment		A bit worried... Especially about the exams that I have in January... I haven't had much time to study... but still I have self-confidence that I will be fine... I hope I'll understand everything and will not be in difficulties... I've already been in Estonia for two weeks and would like to stay longer, but I know I have to return to England soon and start to work and study... It's so nice to rest at home... when mother is always close... and cooks... and is very, very NICE with me!! ☺		Hmm sometimes happy (in English), sometimes sad... I'm somewhat tired... and yes, I was paid less at work... because they deducted the hours I missed when I was in Estonia and then they did not yet pay for the extra hours I've done... they pay next month... hmmm but otherwise things are fine... hmmm and I feel a bit ill... it affects my mood... I hate being sick				Somehow very independent... I'm used to do things on my own... so sometimes I feel that I should make more space for other people in my life... And then happy... because my family loves me so much... being at home was so easy... I had couple of misunderstandings, but it doesn't count... Now I'm back in England and need to decide alone again...		
My life is lately...										Everything is usually nice and cool... but now that I'm back in England, all my friends from the university are away... at home... I need to make new friends again and need to handle this job thing... so that I could work as much as possible... So it would be easier later... But I hope things will work out... as they usually do ☺		

APPENDIX F

LIFE-TRAJECTORY DRAWING TASK

DRAWINGS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

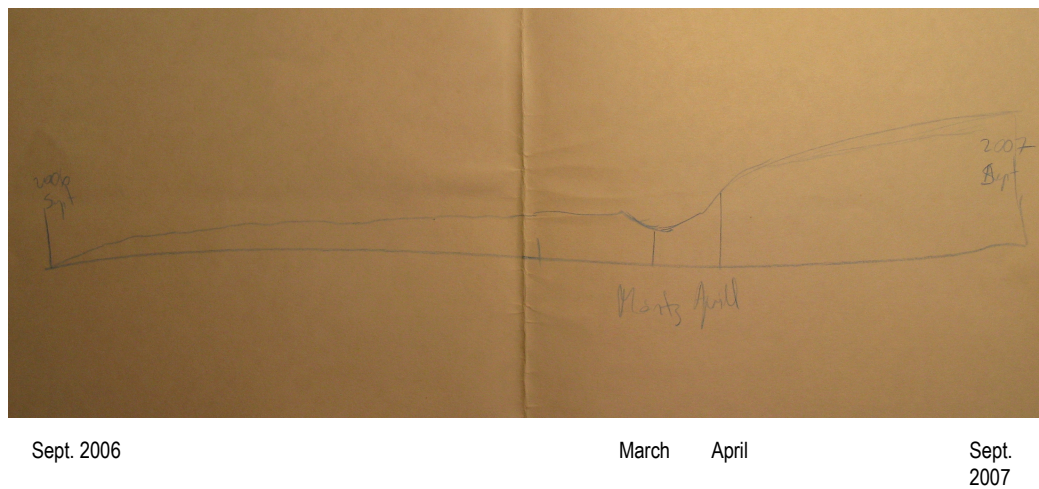


Figure F1. A.'s life-trajectory during the period Sept. 2006 – Sept. 2007

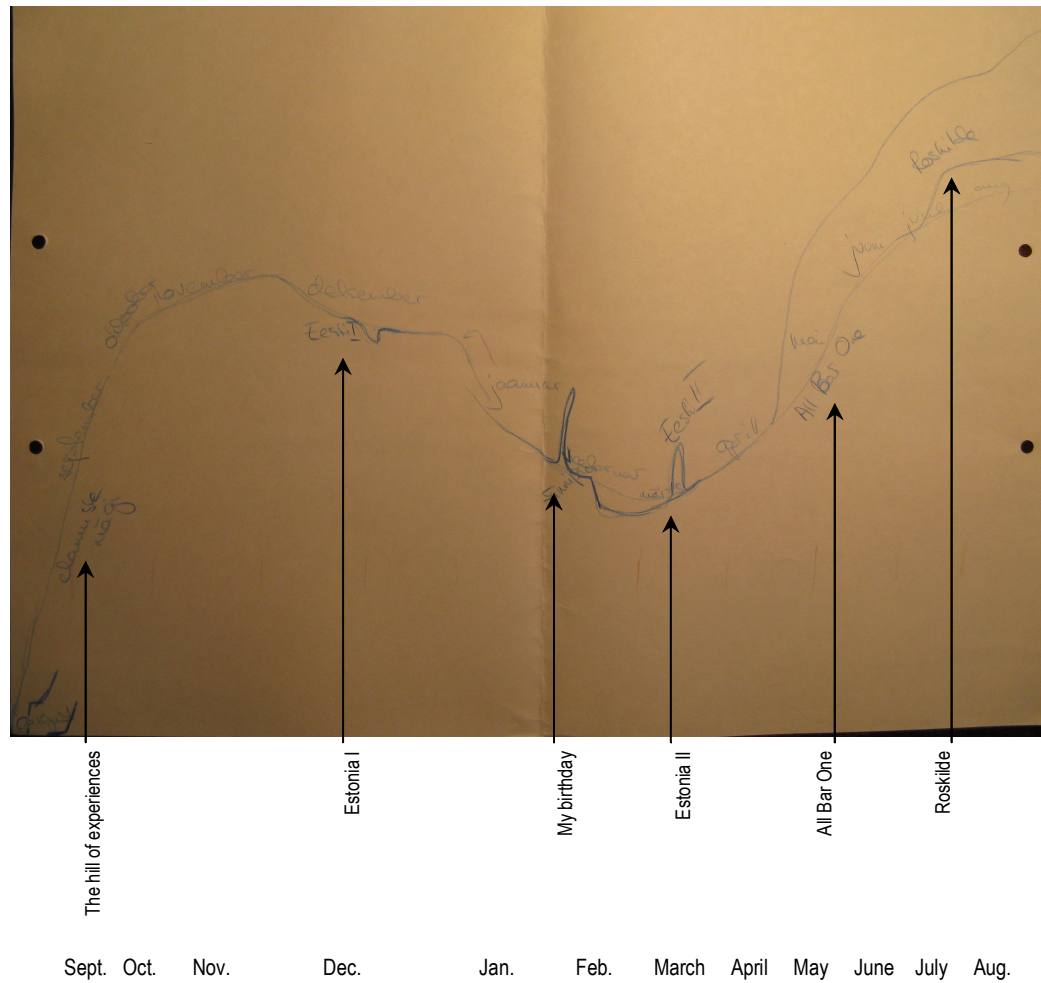


Figure F2. E.'s life-trajectory during the period Sept. 2006 – Sept. 2007

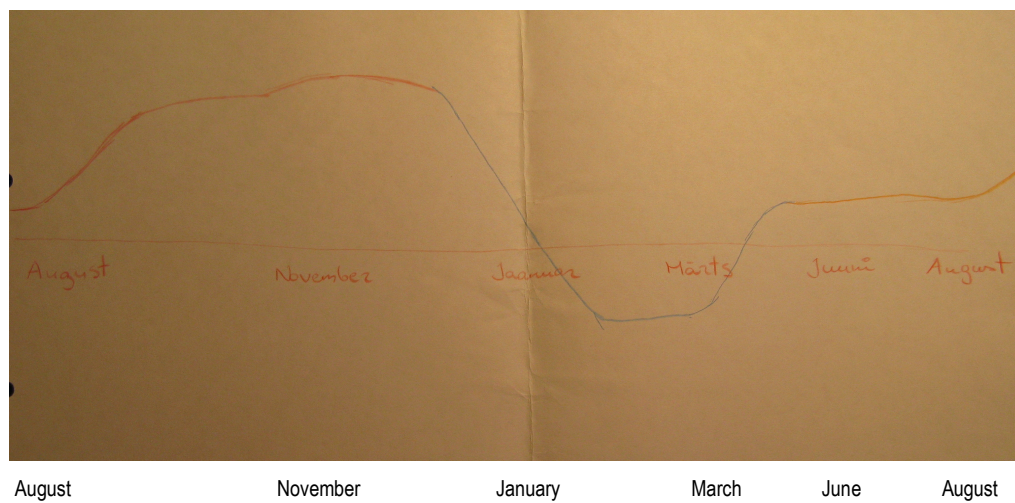


Figure F3. H.'s life-trajectory during the period Aug. 2006 – Aug. 2007

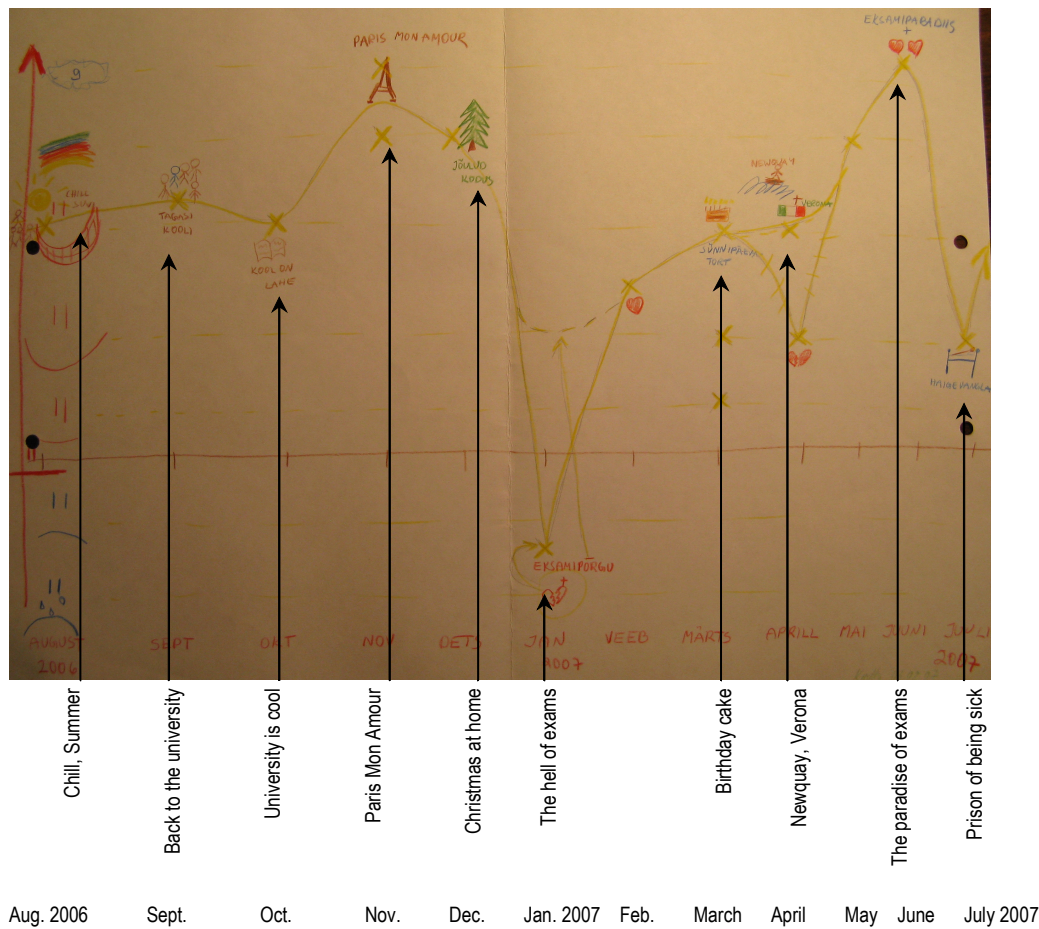


Figure F4. L.'s life-trajectory during the period Aug. 2006 – July 2007

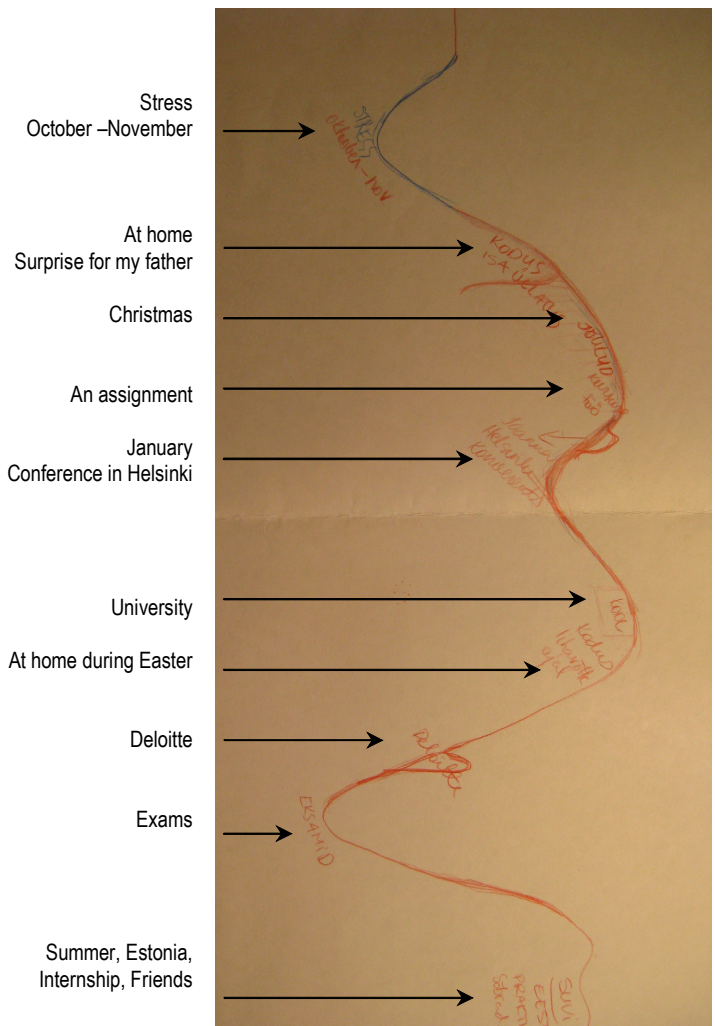


Figure F5. N.'s life-trajectory during the period Sept. 2006 – Aug. 2007

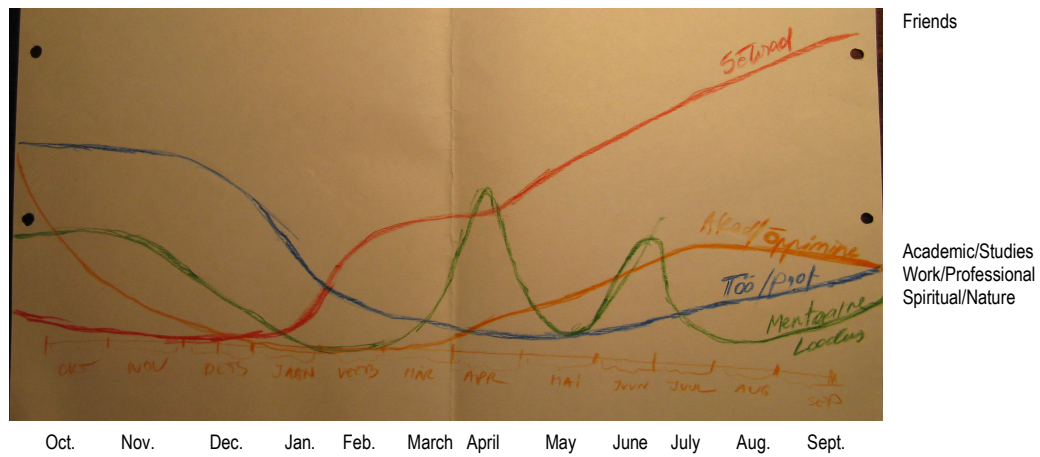


Figure F6. P.'s life-trajectory during the period Oct. 2006 – Sept. 2007

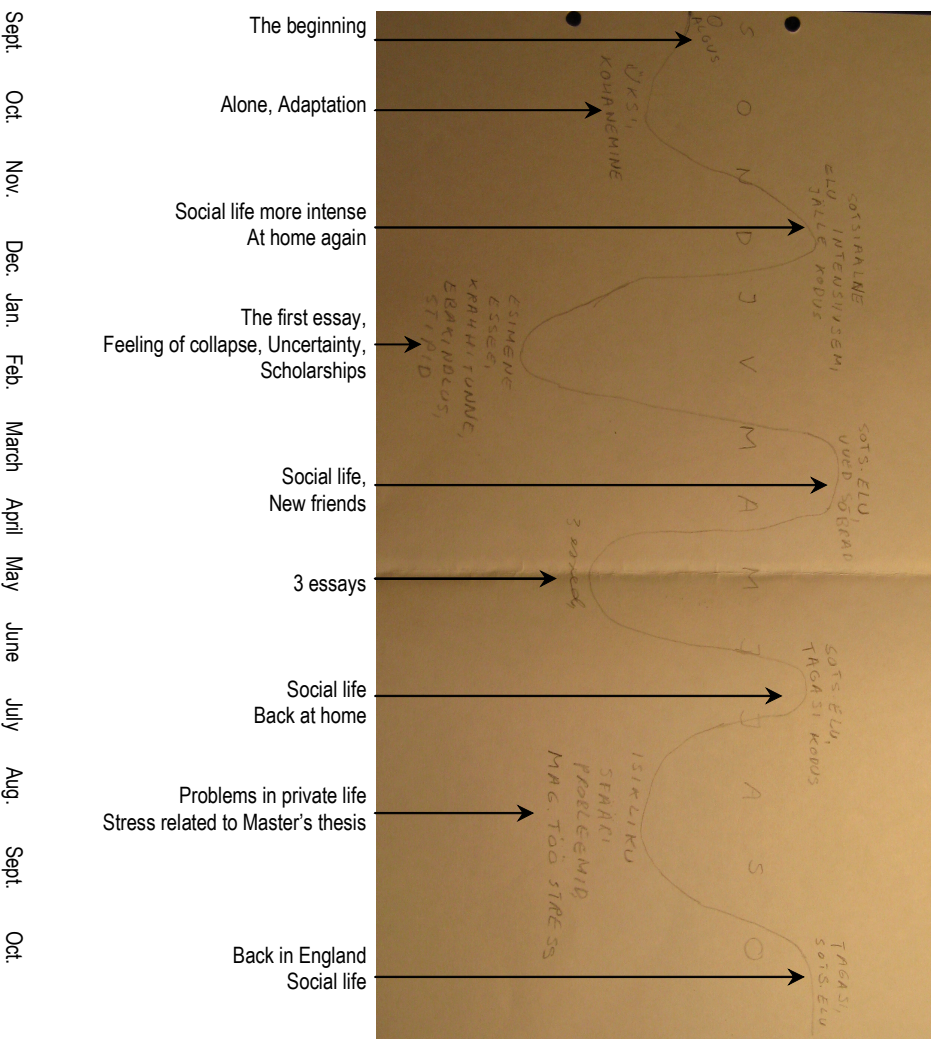


Figure F7. R.'s life-trajectory during the period Sept. 2006 – Oct. 2007

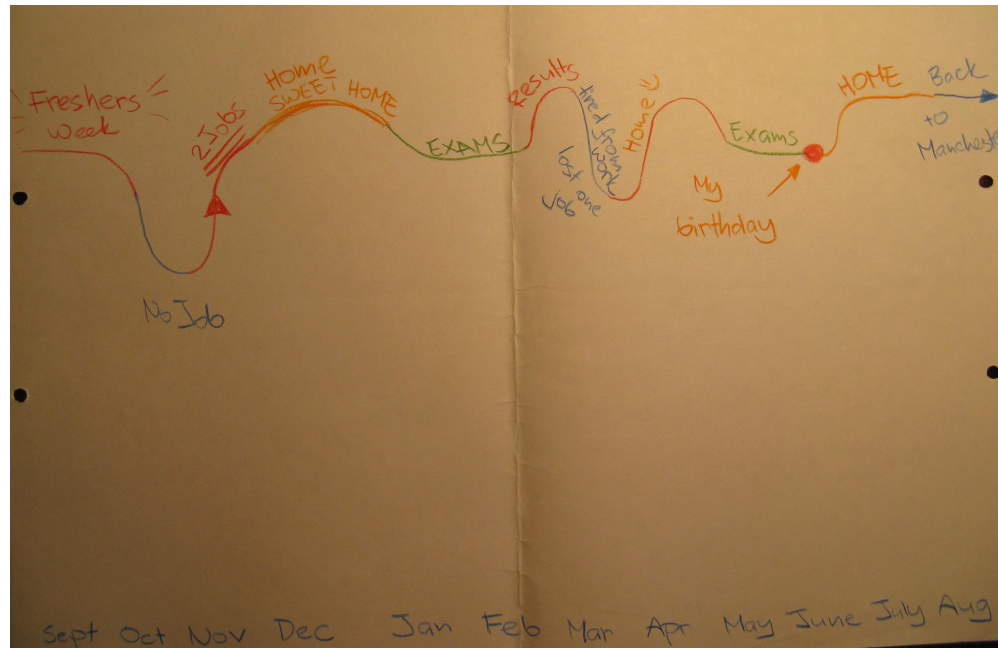


Figure F8. T.'s life-trajectory during the period Sept. 2006 – Aug. 2007